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# THE BREATH OF THE DESERT

THE ACCOUNT OF A JOURNEY THROUGH  
ALGERIA AND TUNISIA

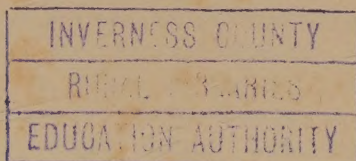
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FERDINAND OSSENDOWSKI

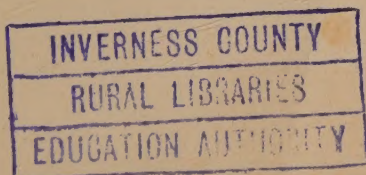
ENGLISH TEXT BY

LEWIS STANTON PALEN

*Collaborator in "Beasts, Men and Gods," "Man and  
Mystery in Asia," "From President to Prison"  
and "The Fire of Desert Folk"*



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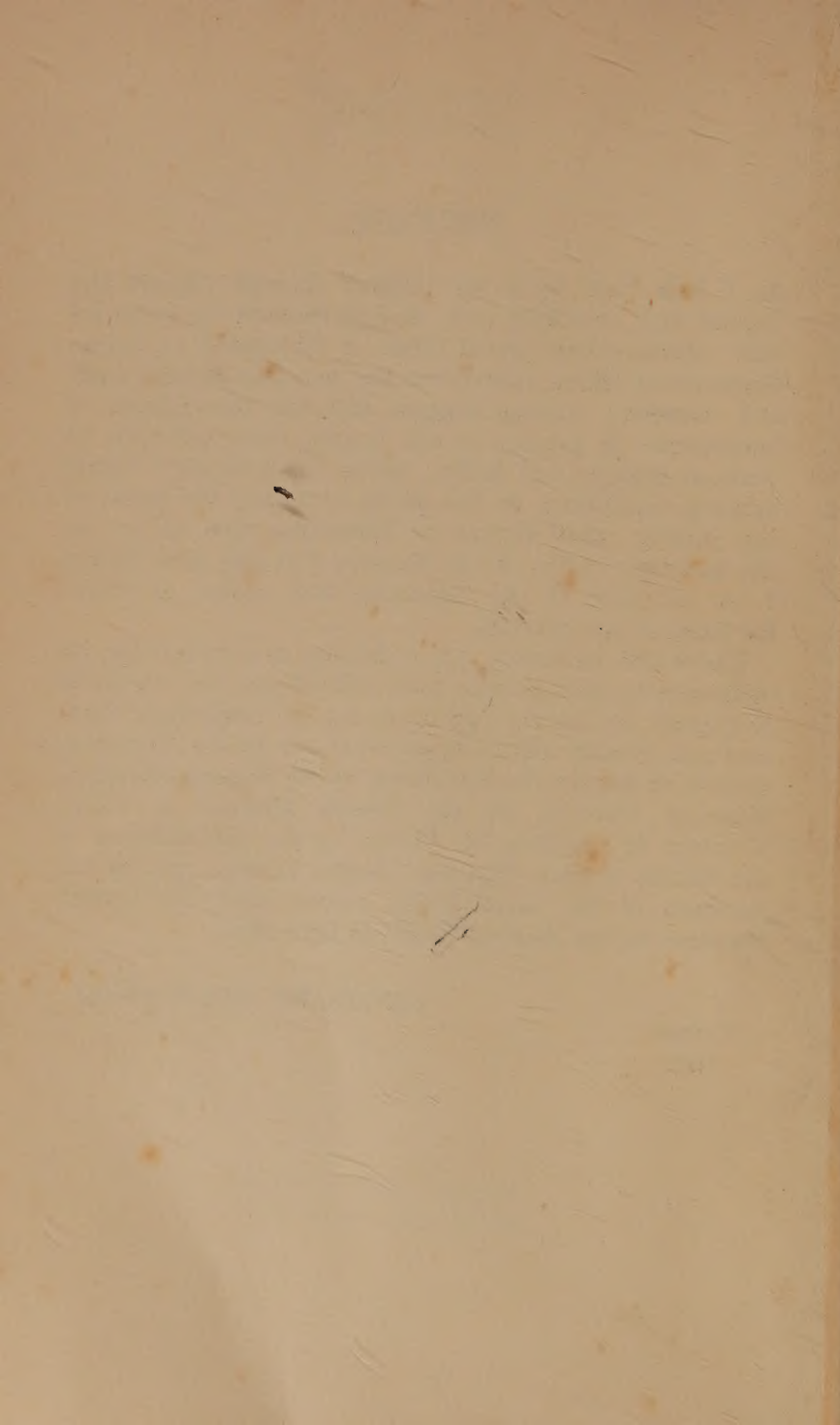
## PREFACE

As I look back upon my journey through Algeria and Tunisia and, especially now, as I go through my notes for this volume—notes jotted down or elaborated in hotels, Government offices, native taverns, wayside Moorish cafés and markets; among beggars and the descendants of buccaneers; in palaces, in the houses, huts and tents of Berbers, Kabyles and Arabs; before the mosques; during hunting expeditions on the plains or among the peaks of the Jujura; amid Roman or Phœnician ruins or out on the limitless wastes of the Sahara—I realize how deeply I am indebted to the assistance and advice of others for much of my material.

Under this realization it is a pleasure to acknowledge my obligation to all those who have assisted me, and especially to express my sincerest gratitude for the hospitality, kindness and friendly advice extended to me by the Governor-General of Algiers, Senator Steeg, by his Secretary-General, Monsieur Dubieuf, by the French Minister in Tunis, Monsieur de Castillion St. Victor, by the administrator of the Maillot district, Monsieur Charles Courtin, and by the members of the small Polish colony with the Consul, Monsieur Arsène Antoine Rosée, at their head.

FERDINAND OSSENDOWSKI

WARSAW  
1925



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# THE BREATH OF THE DESERT

## CHAPTER I

### THE CITY OF THE PIRATES

*" Cuando llegué vencido en ésta tierra  
tan nombrada en el mundo, que en su  
seno tantos piratas cubre, acoge y cierra  
no pude al llanto detener el freno que  
a pesar mio sin saber lo que era me ví  
el marchito rostro de agua lleno."*

CERVANTES: *El Trato de Argel*,  
Escena II, Jornada I.

"HAIL to thee, O ancient and valiant city, whose earth, drenched with the blood of the infidel, thou hast turned to stone!" Thus wrote the poet and scholar, Zahrat en-Nayera, fervently inspired by the grandeur and beauty of Algiers.

To the virgin rocks and rugged mountains the centuries of long ago gave the name of Al-Jezair, which the tongue of the intruders has gradually moulded into "Algiers." Out of a dense mist of legend and fable, spread by the historians and chroniclers of bygone times, the white city rises proudly like a cenotaph to the memory of unknown heroes—a dazzling white monument, glowing in the rays of the brilliant sun and projecting its image on the gently rhythmed waves of the azure sea.

"Icosium is my name!" protests the long-silent voice of an inscription on a crumbling cottage in the street of Bab Azun; "Icosium, a city of the Cæsars!"

"Al-Jezair beni Mezghanna—that is the immortal name

of this city that lives ever in the memory of men," whisper the Arabic legends.

"Argel, the city of pirates and cruel brigands!" insist the chroniclers of Spain.

And it almost seems as though the obscure nomadic tribe of Beni Mezghanna—who came from far beyond the distant shores of the Nile—the Roman cohorts, the crews of mighty privateers, the proud hidalgos of Spain and the waves of other warriors, invaders and oppressors, met and vied with one another to give a final appellation to this city, whose terraces climb to the very peak of the ancient mountain, where the present day still looks upon the gloomy walls of the old Turkish Kasba—this fortress over which the long-gone yesterdays beheld the standards of the beylerbeys, those lieutenants of the Sultan from Stamboul, or the bloody flags of the all-powerful pirates and buccaneers.

But to one inspired soul of past centuries it was simply Argel. . . . With impatient haste I made my way along the Street of Colonel Combe and came to the grotto at whose entrance rises the silent bust of that writer whose name belongs to the whole wide world—Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra, a brave and gallant warrior in the battles of Lepanto, Corfu, Navarrin and Tunis, then a slave, cruelly tormented for five long years by Arnaut Mami and Husein Pasha in Algiers and ever the immortal author of *Don Quixote de La Mancha*.

From 1575 to 1580, dragging the chains of his Turkish and buccaneer jailers, he languished in the dungeons of the beylerbeys' castle, escaping on four different occasions, only to be caught and seized upon again by the blood-stained hands of those wild rulers of Argel. Finally, ransomed by his friends, he returned to his beloved Spain to spread throughout the world the fame of his name.

Looking intently into the marble face of the great author of *Don Quixote*, I could almost hear his whispered story:

"During the fleeting moments of freedom, moments



filled with anxiety and yearning for my beloved country, I wandered through Argel, that shapeless, towering heap of palaces, houses, cabins and filthy, horrible dens, all squeezed together within the ring of high walls that encircled the mountain. I followed with my eyes the narrow, winding, broken pathways that climbed among rocks and over the hills. I slipped along through the dark passages that wound in and out under overhanging balconies and verandas. Through it all I marvelled and wondered at the mighty castles and houses of Turkish chiefs and janizaries, of renegades, beys and pirate leaders. In the harems, high above, sang beautiful slaves; in the dungeons below moaned prisoners, Christian men of all nations. I passed through the long Suk Street from the eastern to the western gate, stopping and listening to the tongues of the French, Spaniards, Italians and Greeks, to the lingos of Albanians, Turks, Arabs and Jews, and to the peculiar speech of the Kabyles and the nomads from the far-away desert. . . ."

"Fare thee well, Don Miguel de Cervantes Saavedra! Now I know what to seek in this white city of Algiers, in this Argel where thou lived the years of thy martyrdom!"

Such was my thought as I took leave of the statue of Cervantes and turned toward the heart of the city, the old Arab quarter, or rather the conglomerate of population, mingled in the most weird fashion, whose ancestors had gathered here in the days of the Turkish rule. Modern French quarters touched and broke through its periphery at many points, giving the old town the appearance of Paris, renewed and redecorated. Occasionally the elements of Europeanization have penetrated further toward its centre, where tall modern buildings here and there tower over the tumbling native houses of Al-Jezair. Fortunately, the process of modernization is slow, so that the traveller can still move in the mysterious atmosphere of bygone days.

Kasba Street, which was Suk Street when the great

Cervantes strode along it, crosses the entire city as the principal thread of a labyrinthine pattern of narrow, winding, often blind alleys and passage-ways. Some of these seem to climb up to the very peak of the mountain, often in steps paved with round cobbles or unfinished stone slabs, at the sides of which one frequently finds pure, clear water from the mountain lakes or the many fountains. Enclosed verandas overhang the streets and often come flush with the opposite balconies, thus forming darkened passages that appear at times as mysterious and sombre tunnels. Here and there a deep niche in the thick walls shelters a fountain, whose never-resting stream splashes and murmurs as it falls gently into its marble bowl.

The blind walls, only occasionally dotted with small windows that are jealously guarded by their iron grilles, do not bespeak the grandeur and magnificence of wealthy merchants' houses, of the palaces of Arab chiefs or of mullahs. Sometimes, however, the whiteness of a marble niche or a bronze panel on an elaborate gate will arrest the eyes of a sauntering stranger. These heavily walled structures are the old *dars* that formerly belonged to pirates, Turkish agas, pashas and merchants, or to the renegades who were so highly esteemed by the sultans for their valued advice on matters of war or on the government of the country. Long since these houses have changed hands, and the new owners have filled them with their stores of merchandise, even installed within them their machinery, so that now engines and looms throb and clatter in those halls and banquet-rooms where, in the days of old, mighty and brave captains of pirate ships boisterously sang their songs and filled their cups, and where, under the flails of their warders, moaned many a group of Christian slaves, those unknown martyrs who died with the name of Christ on their lips, for in Him was their only hope. The consuls of foreign States, priests and special envoys exerted their influence to ransom prisoners of wealthy and famous



1. PROFESSOR F. A. OSSENDOWSKI



2. GENERAL VIEW OF ALGIERS



families ; but who cared or thought about the fate of the poor, of the men of the people or the common sailors of all those frigates and galleys which were captured by these daring pirates of the Mediterranean ?

Climbing the steep mountain, the narrow streets clamber up to the very peak where the Berbers had their stronghold until it was captured by the Turks, who in time encircled it with larger and stronger ramparts and walls, within which they gathered the principal treasure of the entire Turkish possessions of North Africa. In this medley of buildings of the old city, with the Kasba towering above it all, in its labyrinth of winding streets and passages one can find many relics and reminders of other centuries, monuments of the throbbing past.

If you follow the crowd of women trudging from their distant homes to the shrine of hope, cloistering mute prayers for fecundity in their hearts, you will come to the old mosque of the Marabout Sidi Mohammed esh-Sherif, with the tomb of this saint, who died in 1541, and its miraculous fountain, whose blessed waters are worshipped by every married woman of Algiers.

Further along rises the mosque of Jama Safir, built by the Dutch renegade Safar ben Abdallah, who introduced new architectural motives by adding an octagonal cupola and adorning the interior of the temple with Persian majolica. Near by, in the peace of the small Mussulman graveyard, lie the bodies of two princesses in the shadow of ancient olive-trees. On their graves fortunes are told and miracles are wrought. Hosts of blind beggars and ragged women swarm the small cemetery, throw dice or stones on the ground before them and, from the pattern or figure they make, read the fate of those who like to peep behind the curtain of the unknown and mysterious future.

In the daytime, under the rays of the scorching sun, the old city is crowded and noisy. Innumerable shops, booths and small workrooms teem with activity, while throngs of

Arabs, Berbers and Kabyles hawk their wares along the streets. At night, when sparsely posted lanterns are lighted at the street corners, the crowds disappear within the hiding-places of their houses and dwellings. The few passers-by who saunter along the narrow passages seem different under the metamorphosed lighting—they even change their appearance, for they no longer wear their half-European clothes, but don their traditional burnouses and draw their hoods close over the dark-red fezes. In these hours of the dark the inhabitants of this city look into the eyes of a belated European more daringly, even muttering now and then a curse, full of contempt and invective.

From the unseen interiors that one passes come the strains of noisy music, while the uncurtained fronts of dark, odorous, smoky taverns and cafés show them to be thronged with teeming humanity. In them the crowds are playing cards, throwing dice, listening to wandering musicians and bards, and discussing everything that interests the people of the city, of the colony and of the whole of Moslem Africa. Here, with a good Arabic scholar to interpret, one can sit at a corner-table, sip aromatic coffee and listen to the endless tales of bold pirates of the sea—the legend and pride of Algiers.

In my first voyage of discovery to the vast unknown that lay within this curious city I was aided by the honorary Polish Consul, Monsieur Arsène Antoine Rosée, a Frenchman full of love and understanding for Algiers. With him I wandered about the city both by day and by night; and, through his kindly advice, was enabled to explore for myself.

Thus one evening I went with a native guide to a café in the Arab quarter to listen to the tales of the bards. An old Berber jingled on his *derbuka* and, scanning his words, drawled in a deep, drawn-out voice this pirate lay:

“When thy back shall be turned upon this city, and

thine eyes shall look upon the shore of the sea, wend thy steps, O *mumen*, to the Cape of Matifu. There a place thou shalt find, which the men of years call Hamza. Sodden with blood is its earth ; the djinns of revenge are born there. Arbal towers above it, once a powerful castle with a mosque within its walls ; now a heap of ruins, of crumbling ramparts overgrown with aloë-trees and figs. Yet, on the site of the mosque that was, a red stone pillar still stands to-day. . . .

“ Husein Talem, the intrepid, noble pirate leader, built the castle and the mosque. Great was his power—a fleet of an hundred armed and swift-winged frigates rode at his beck and call. The infidel dreaded the name of Husein, and, when his ensign of the axe floated over the sea, no galley of Spain or Italy dared to venture from her harbour.

“ It came to pass that Husein, when once sailing from Al-Jezair to Gibraltar, came upon a ship of the French, captured the infidel galley and took her crew into slavery. On the ship was also a woman, whose youth and beauty caused the brave captain to take her unto himself as a wife. He gave her the name of Annaya and he loved her more than life and more than glory. Her every wish spelt a command to him and for her he gave up his ships. Like a faithful dog he looked into her eyes and did her bidding.

“ Full was his cup of happiness, when suddenly an illness came upon Annaya. Though the most famous wizards and doctors took counsel together and shook their heads wisely, naught could be done, no remedy availed. While his beautiful wife drooped and withered like an autumn leaf, there came one day to Husein a wise *kahin*, who said unto him :

“ ‘ Build a mosque to the glory of Allah. Go to Mecca and pray for thy wife.’ Obeying the command, the mighty *ras* caused a mosque to be erected, supporting its arches on

pillars of marble, white as the snow of the hills. Then he started for Mecca.

"When on his way the servant brought him the ill tidings that his wife had gone out from his house, had left him. Like a flash of angry lightning Husein turned and sped back to his vacant house. There he commanded before him thirty hundred of his faithful pirates, and dispatched them into every corner of the land and sea to search for and find his Annaya.

"One of his groups came upon her disguised as a man near Ténès and dragged her back to their lord. Pronouncing neither word of greeting nor reproach, Husein motioned his servants to lead her into the mosque, where they tied her to the central pillar and locked the doors of the house of worship. At night, Husein himself opened a vault and let a hungry lion into the mosque. At dawn, the white bones of Annaya alone were found.

"The temple was burned, and everything perished. Only the central pillar, stained with a woman's blood, stood in the midst of the ruins. Its dull, purple colour persists unto this day. To this pillar came Husein every morning, to pray, to weep and to think—the mighty, hardened and pitiless Husein Talem, the 'Axe of the Sea.' When the days of death drew near unto him, he placed in the base of the pillar a vessel of stone, filled with gold, as a sacrifice to the djinns of hatred and revenge that dwelt there.

"Thus it often happens, *mumen*! A wife may be the sun of your life or the venom that poisons even the last days of your existence!"

Later, in the Moorish cafés, I heard hosts of similar tales regarding the past of Algiers, the city of pirates. With the songs of the bards still in my ears I threaded my way through winding streets into the modern town, so magnificently and attractively appointed by its present rulers, the French. Wide, well-paved streets, thronged with smartly dressed men and women, brilliant with the

glare of electric lamps ; luxurious hotels, restaurants and cafés ; branch establishments of the most fashionable Paris houses ; tramways, boulevards, theatres, music, clubs, the university—all these there are, yet even here, in this new Paris, one finds traces of the storied past.

In the first place there are the two mosques, Jama el-Jdid and Jama el-Kebir, each of which has its mystery and its legend. The former, similar in design to the mosques of Byzantium, was built under the orders of a Turkish pasha by a Christian slave, who gave to it the form of a cross and received as his reward death on a pale. The other was erected on the ruins of a Christian church of ancient Icosium. Its architecture reminds one of the old mosques that still stand in Cordova, and clearly suggests that Moorish craftsmen took part in its construction. Both are of an immense size, easily accommodating thousands of the Faithful. Old copies of the Koran, written and illuminated by Andalusian artists, veritable treasures of Moorish art, are kept within these mosques.

The palaces of the Governor-General and of the Archbishop are typical of the Moorish architecture of the eighteenth century. Erected under the Turkish domination, they abound in marble pillars, carved doors, beams and cornices encrusted with gold, precious stones and Arab tiles, and in windows of multi-coloured mosaics. Further specimens of this craftsmanship, which has endured and flourished in Algiers throughout its stormy existence, can be found and studied in the well-appointed Museum of Moslem Art.

A curiosity of the capital of this French colony is the Botanical Garden, established and maintained by Messieurs Hardy and Rivière. Within it one can admire long rows of palm, Ficus, *Chamærops excelsa*, bamboo, *Dracæna* and *Latania* ; lakes set with aquatic plants and swarming with goldfish and small carp ; thickets of eucalyptus and *Araucaria*, which, in the climate of Algiers, have forgotten



their native lands of Australia and South America and are making rapid and magnificent growth upon their adopted soil. Dotted here and there throughout the town are many monuments of olden days, of men of the past—a Moslem cemetery with the *kubba* of Sidi Abd er-Rahman Bu-Kobrin, that mysterious saint whose body, according to the Kabyles, was supposed to have been buried in two separate graves, a belief which led the Turks to inter the two reputed bodies of the saint here in one tomb, in order to avoid the gathering of pilgrims in two different places; the grotto of Cervantes; the well of the famous pirate Murad, who terrorized Sardinia and was renowned as a sorcerer; the ruins of the old Phœnician township of Rusguniæ; and something more modern and quite different, “The Ravine of the Wild Woman.”

This strange appellation naturally leads one to think that a savage woman, say from Kabylia, may have performed here some great feat of bravery or have committed some ghastly revenge. In reality it is quite different. Shortly after the occupation of Algiers by the French, a young and attractive French girl opened a small tavern in the ravine, where she distilled absinthe and spread unlicensed drunkenness amongst the soldiers of the garrison. The authorities took steps, but the struggle was long and protracted, for the woman had a tongue as sharp as her teeth and used them both in the attempt to save her absinthe from the hands of the excise officials. From beyond her grave the “wild woman” may now repeat, with Horace, that she remained for ever in the memory of men.

Beautiful and picturesque is the city of Algiers, stretching like a white bird from the shore of the sea to the peak of the Kasba, extending its wing in the form of its modern suburb Mustapha, and gazing upon its reflexion in the ever-growing harbour, guarded by the mountain-chain of the Great Kabylia.

My wife and I arrived in the city from the oasis of Figig,

after having traversed the territory of the High Plateaux and the western region of the whole of Algeria through Tlemsen, Sidi Bel Abbès, Orléansville and the holy city of Miliana, where rests the body of the mysterious prophet and scholar, Si Ahmed ben Yusuf, a great satirist and cynic. This Ben Yusuf, an Andalusian Moor, a renowned scholar and sorcerer, made use of his supernatural powers and his occult science exclusively for the benefit of the poor and wronged. His critical, ascetic mind condemned the unwholesome, sinful life of cities, immersed in lust, debauchery and wealth. His sayings were frank and outspoken, and his dicta and appellations stuck to the respective cities like tar.

Thus, for example, he described Cherchell :

"Thou ugly burgh of Cherchell ! Though thy streets are wide and thy squares are spacious, those that live within thy bourns are misers, vagabonds and robbers. For a traveller who is not a sailor or a blacksmith there is nothing to do but hastily to shake thy dust from off his feet."

Of Miliana, where he spent considerable time, he spoke thus :

"Miliana . . . Miliana . . . ! There everything and everybody is ruled by women ; men are but women's slaves !"

I know not how much truth there is in the old wizard's sayings, but when I visited Miliana it certainly seemed to me that the men were lazy and idle, while the women radiated energy and diligence. If these, my observations, be correct, I can understand how it came to pass that the brave men of Miliana found themselves under the ruthless rule of the red and yellow slippers of their women-folk.

Since the old prophet appealed so successfully to the vanity of the ladies of Miliana, it is not surprising that he was a favourite and was praised by them wherever they went. In other cities the sarcastic wizard was less popular

and was not infrequently subjected to mockery and even persecution. A particularly unpleasant adventure must have come his way in Ténès, for he thus anathematized that city :

“ Ténès ! Thou art built on a dung-hill ; thy water is bloody, thine air is venomous. By Allah ! Ben Yusuf shall not spend even one night within thy walls ! ”

During our voyage from the south, from the threshold of the Sahara to Algiers, we could observe the rapid development throughout this French colony. Every aspect of soil cultivation—grain-fields, vineyards, olive-groves, fruit-orchards, tobacco-plantations—was well represented. Near Orléansville we saw first experiments in cotton-growing being made, where about 600 hectares<sup>1</sup> have already been put under the crop. Even the cursory view from a speeding train enabled us to realize the extent and success of the initial efforts in all these branches of agriculture.

The statistics which I gathered in Algiers prove this beyond a doubt. The area of the whole colony is 57·6 million hectares, of which 20·8 million form the fertile north and 36·8 the barren south. This vast territory is only partly populated, for the French statistics return the number of natives at 5,000,000 and that of the European colonists at 830,000. Under the European influence the natives of the north devote themselves more and more willingly to agriculture, as is shown by the fact that there are already 5·2 million hectares of cultivated soil belonging to natives and 2·2 million owned by Europeans. In the south, only 103,000 hectares are under cultivation, which is readily accounted for by unfavourable conditions of soil and climate.

What is produced on these 7·5 million hectares of cultivated soil ? Wine, cereals of all kinds, olives, fruit, tobacco, vegetables and the alfa-grass that is sought after

<sup>1</sup> A hectare = 2·471 acres.

as a raw material for various industries. Woods and forests cover three million hectares of the territory, pines, cedars and deciduous trees being found in abundance. On the vast pasture-lands and in the valleys one can see herds of sheep and of practically every species of cattle.

Mineral deposits, however, form the chief source of Algeria's natural wealth. In addition there are also many springs, the most popular of which are the Hammam Rhira and the Hammam Meluan, in the Department of Constantine. In this one department no fewer than one hundred and seventy spas have been discovered, including many containing alkali, soda, sulphur, salt, iron and ferric acid. Deposits of phosphates are in great abundance here and are manufactured into commercial fertilizer. Apart from these the French are always exploiting other deposits of iron ore, lead, copper, zinc, antimony, mercury, chromite ores, salt and even onyx and marble. Geological researches tend to confirm the existence of petroleum, especially in the Tliuanet district, in the Department of Oran. There is no doubt that, as soon as the present complicated political conditions of Europe return to their normal state, intensified activities will commence in Algeria, aiming at the extension of the present area of arable land by means of irrigation; that new mining and industrial undertakings will be initiated; and that the present nucleus of European industry in Algiers will be steadily developed.

One particular circumstance impresses the mind of the European traveller in Algeria. It is that the gradual and continuous development of agriculture and industry has created a large native proletariat, an element unknown in Morocco, with the possible exception of Casablanca. Of course the native beggars, or *meskins*, might be regarded as constituting a proletariat; but the organizations which they form and their adherence to religious sects, such as the Aïssawa, taken in conjunction with the official view of

Islam on the subject of beggars, lead us to discard this hypothesis. The Moroccan *meskins* form a recognized class of society and are not, as in European countries, a declassed element of the proletariat. Even the homeless, unskilled and unemployed Moslem nomads do not fall within the ordinary classification of "proletariat," for they either hire themselves out for long-term labour or sell themselves into slavery, thus disappearing in the mass of native population and occupying no recognized position in the social hierarchy.

In Algeria it is different; for the Europeanization of this colony, the introduction of Western economic systems and the development of "urbanism," which has produced such cities as Algiers with 250,000 inhabitants, Oran with 155,000 and Constantine with 82,000, all demand short-period, even casual labour, create competition in the labour-market and attract crowds in search of employment.

In Algiers you may find representatives of the riff-raff proletariat loafing about the city, the harbour, the factories and the railways. These proletarians, adopting the methods of their European comrades, have declassed themselves through their own indifference by drifting away from their religion, their traditions, their mosques, their religious sects and recognized society. Nowhere can they now be admitted into a brotherhood assembled round a Marabout, reigning over his fold in the *zaouia*, nor to the Aïssawa, Haddawa or any other sects; neither will they be included in a household as domestic slaves. Even the *meskins*, those inveterate cynics, will not allow them to enter their weird though powerful organization. These outcasts, this social refuse, is created by "urbanism," a fact that is confirmed by the conditions in Casablanca, which is the one town in Morocco that is unique in this respect.

After having spent a few days in the city of Algiers, I went on to explore the surrounding country, travelling by motor in a vast zigzag across the whole of Algeria. From



the capital on the shores of the Mediterranean I went south to the Sahara, and from there, via the oasis of Biskra and by Timgad and Batna, I proceeded to Constantine, thence back to the Mediterranean at Bona and on eastward to Tunis.

## CHAPTER II

### AWAY TO THE DESERT

AT five o'clock of an October morning I left Algiers for the south. It was bitterly cold and dark. My luggage consisted of only a small suit-case, the same one that had seen half the world, including China, Japan, the Hawaiian Islands and North America, and in which the ever-seeking hands of Customs officials on four continents had ceaselessly meddled. A 44-calibre Winchester, a Kodak and a pair of Zeiss field-glasses completed my equipment, all of which, if need be, I could carry myself.

The car started for the oasis of Bu Saada, which was to be the first important point on our journey. It sped along past large and small Berber villages, where there mingled with the native population a considerable Jewish element, long since assimilated and only distinguishable from the Mussulmans by the black berrettas and the raven-black curly locks framing the temples. The intruders and rulers from Europe have also found their way here. Well cultivated fields, sown with barley, wheat and millet, large fruit-orchards and olive-trees, vineyards and tobacco-plantations stretch away from the shores of the Mediterranean. To the south, where the high table-lands melt into steppes, flocks of sheep and goats range the grassy plains; further, on the outskirts of the Sahara, under the clouds of desert sand, lie immense, uncultivated, gloomy wastes, whereon oases of slim date-bearing palms blossom like beautiful bouquets.

After having crossed the plain of Bufarik just outside Algiers with its magnificent fields, gardens and orchards, and having passed the large village of L'Arba, famous for

its orange-groves, vineyards and tobacco-plantations, kept fresh by the waters of the Jemaa River, we began to climb the hilly country and to run through forests and lighter wooded lands, winding at times along deep precipices, from which the road was separated in many places by only a low stone wall.

This whole coastal district bears the name of "The Tell." It stretches from Morocco to Tunisia, and reaches away from the azure Mediterranean on the north to the high table-lands in the south. Through the district extend the chains of the Tell Atlas, picturesque and full of charm. In the valleys, along the rivulets and streams, villages are scattered, surrounded by tall poplars, meadows with their countless flocks of grazing sheep and orchards in which natives of light complexion, and at times of unquestioned beauty, work among the trees.

In the neighbourhood of the Sakomody settlement we drove past beautifully coloured chalk cliffs, in which the French are working deposits of zinc ore. Still climbing, the car threaded with difficulty wild, narrow ravines, until at last we reached an altitude of nearly three thousand feet, where we stopped to fill the radiator with water from a famous stream, the renowned Aïn el-Bird, and ourselves with inferior coffee.

Beyond this point the landscape rapidly changed and bare valleys and barren rocks became dominant. Through them we descended until, round a turn in the road, we made out in the distance an extensive, almost circular bowl, surrounded by naked mountains. Above it hung heavy clouds, as if woven of thick, white thread. Then languidly the lighter of them disappeared, uncovering the horizon and disclosing the bottom of the ravine, where a river ran between thickets, and the white walls of cottages along its banks. We sped along through chalk-rocks and sand-hills washed by the swollen river, passing at times slow-moving caravans of camels, hailing from the south,

from the Sahara, and carrying heavy loads of dates—the “grain and gold” of the desert.

As the car continued to slip down the winding road, the settlement of Tablat, the Isser River flowing in several beds and fed by the smaller streams of El-Had and Zaruat, olive and fig-groves, neat native cottages with glass windows and tiled roofs, bearing traces of European influence, a cedar-forest where we inhaled the pure atmosphere saturated with resin, reminding one of the dusky chambers of old palaces and mosques, where the ancient ceiling-beams exude the persisting fragrance of cedar-pitch—all this flitted before my eyes, while the car sped on, hooting and screaming madly at the turns, scaring flocks of sheep and camels that, in panic, sought refuge on the slopes above.

Suddenly, something brought me to my feet.

“Stop, stop!” I cried to the chauffeur, who brought the car to a standstill with a harsh grind of the brakes and inquired in anxious amazement what was the matter.

“Look there! Look!” I replied, pointing to a wide plain that was visible through an opening in the tops of the cedar-trees.

No huntsman has the right to overlook what I had just seen. In the distance a native horseman on a fine chestnut suddenly stood up in his stirrups, unslung his gun and, setting his horse into a gallop, dashed forward until the skirts of his burnous were straight out on the wind. He must have spied something that was worthy of pursuit, a few drams of powder and a bullet—at least so my sportsman’s heart whispered to me. Sharing his excitement, I reached for my field-glasses and, scanning the thicket of bushes and grass, searched the plain and waited.

There it was, a black boar, running with its snout low through the grass and forcing its way with all speed toward the forest. As it was headed in our direction, I threw a cartridge into the chamber of my rifle and waited, hoping

that it might come out on the road within range of the stand I had taken.

The beast had disappeared among the cedars, followed closely by the Berber horseman. Suddenly a shot rang out—only one, and it sounded so lone and exotic.

"He missed it," cried my greedy soul. "Now the boar is mine!"

I searched the forest with my eyes, trying to pierce the dense growth of trees, all the time fingering caressingly the trigger of my rifle. Some minutes passed without any sign of either the boar or the horseman. Impatient, I struck into the forest and began searching about for the beast. When a considerable distance from the road, I discovered the Berber walking along, unmoved and preoccupied with the reloading of his long-barrelled gun, encrusted with silver. Ignoring Oriental etiquette, I inquired eagerly :

"*Halluf er-Raba* (the boar)?"

He smiled benignantly and, pressing his hands to his mouth, greeted me courteously with the customary :

"*Salaam aleikum!*"

"*Aleikum es-salaam,*" I responded, slightly embarrassed. But the sportsman's blood resented the delay and forced me to repeat my question :

"*Halluf?*"

The Berber made no reply, but simply pointed behind him, where, at about fifty yards, his horse was just coming into view, picking its way along the steep slope of the hill, which was covered with a slippery carpeting of leaves and needles. Across the saddle lay the now lifeless boar. I inspected it carefully and found it had a bullet behind the ear—a good and certain shot! Only a Berber or a Tuareg could have placed a bullet so well from the saddle—and this not from a precise Winchester or Mauser, but from a native rifle, made by an ordinary *haddad*, or blacksmith-gunmaker!

I offered the native a cigarette, returned to the car and



went on my way. In Aumale, the chauffeur halted outside an inn with the announcement that we had made one hundred and twenty-five kilometres and that we should stop here for luncheon.

While it was being prepared, I strolled into the quaint town. As I was passing one of the native buildings, the legend "Museum" struck my eye.

"How amusing to find a museum in this tiny village," I thought, entering the building the while. I did not regret my visit, inasmuch as I learned some interesting facts about the miniature city.

Aumale is the new French name for this place, which was, however, known even in ancient times; for the Romans, in their colonizing and military progress through North Africa, established here a strong fortress and large commercial warehouses. In those days of the first century of our era it was called Auzia. Then the Berbers, and later the Asiatic Arabs, completely destroyed this stronghold of ancient Rome, but neither they nor the centuries that swept over Auzia could destroy the Latin inscriptions carved in stone by order of the *cives Romani*. It is some of these stones and inscriptions that the French have so reverently collected and deposited in the Aumale Museum, together with various other objects excavated on the site of this former Roman colony.

The native appellation for Aumale is "Sur Ghozlan," that is, the "Walls of Ghozlan." This Ghozlan was a mythological Achilles of the Berbers, a brave and mighty hero who resisted the black invaders from the south that came for murder and loot. In the legends and songs that live in praise of Ghozlan the swiftness of his feet is commended above all his other qualities. He ran like the wind and was said to be swifter than a gazelle.

When I returned to the inn, luncheon was ready, but, with most of the dishes cooked in bitter oil, it was not worthy of the fight which one had to make for it with one's



3. AN OLD STREET IN THE CITY OF PIRATES



4. THE BOTANICAL GARDEN, ALGIERS

uninvited guests, the vicious and obstinate flies. The only thing that saved the day was their pronounced inclination to suicide, for they cast themselves into the soup, the wine, the mustard and the coffee.

In the dining-room, besides myself and my chauffeur, there were several officers of the local garrison and two ladies, dressed modestly in black. They were speaking Russian to each other, and their eyes carried that sad expression so well known to me since the collapse of the Empire. The lines of bitterness round their mouths were those which one so uniformly sees on the faces of Russian refugees in foreign lands, where not only the difficult economic conditions but the still more trying disappointments and shattered hopes leave these ineradicable traces.

I beckoned to the waiter and asked him :

“ Are these ladies Russian ? ”

“ Yes, sir ! *Deux princesses russes*,” he replied in a proud voice.

“ What are they doing here ? ”

“ They travel from one town to another teaching music,” he explained.

I do not know whether they were princesses, but this would not make a difference in any case ; for a tragic drama was indicated in the eyes, in the features and in the plain, too plain, dresses of these women whom the absurdity and outrage of the Russian Revolution had cast up here on the parched soil of Africa.

One of the ladies rose and passed into the next room, where there was a piano. After a moment the sound of music, of genuine music, not that of restaurants and dance-halls, floated into and filled the room to the exclusion of all else. Chopin was followed by Tchaikowski, then—Scriabin, Rachmaninoff and Rimsky Korsakoff. . . .

I sat at table for a long while, much longer than was necessary, disregarding the flies and the odour of burned oil issuing from the kitchen. In the music of that unknown



woman, thrust out from a dire land of extremes, contrasts and historical inconsistencies, I sensed tears, grief and despair, and realized the full force of the drama. On first thought I wanted to meet these women, but then I reflected that perhaps they had come here to Algeria in order to be able to forget their distant, unhappy country, in order that no echo of the gloomy past, of the tragedy which they had been compelled to witness, should ever reach their grieved and sensitive hearts.

As we went forth on our journey, in my soul I long carried the memory of the yearning music of that Russian woman with her tragic eyes and her martyr's features.

The car climbed again, this time along the slopes of the Jebel Dira chain, up to an altitude of nearly 3,400 feet, whence, turning down the valley of the Jenan River, it reached the edge of the great cultivated plain which surrounds the lake of Shott el-Hodna. We stopped for a time in the village of Sidi Aïssa, where we found its mixed Berber and Jewish population dwelling in filthy houses and almost eaten up by flies, the plague of these districts, where diseases of the eyes are so prevalent.

Beyond the settlement stretched a plain, in which I observed a mirage with the customary mirror-like lake surrounded by shimmering trees and here and there dotted with minute islands. Soon the plain passed into a desert, strewn with sand and stones and swarming with agamas and locusts. Once, from amidst the stones, there darted out past me a large varan, which I chased to the bank of a dried-up stream, where it eluded me. I also came upon two peculiar dark lizards with black stripes, about six inches in length and with very short, poorly developed extremities. They made off swiftly at first, but, realizing that I was pursuing them, wriggled themselves into the sand and disappeared from view, so that only the movement of the sandy surface betrayed their whereabouts. In the end I succeeded in capturing one specimen, and in



Biskra was informed by experts on the Algerian fauna that it was a *Scincus officinalis*, known among the Arabs as "the fish of the sand" and vigorously hunted by them. Their ardour in this chase is explained by the fact that from time immemorial the various parts of a lizard have been regarded in Arab medicine as infallible remedies against a number of diseases. The natives, Arabs and Berbers alike, catch these animals, dry them in the sun and grind them into a powder, which is eagerly sought after as well by the sick as by the native hakims. They also believe that the *Scincus* exterminates scorpions. This feature of the small animal's life I was unable to substantiate, although I have myself seen a *Scincus* attack an ordinary green lizard. Whether it was a hereditary blood-feud attack or merely a fight for booty I could not make out, for the *Scincus* ultimately buried himself in the sand and the lizard disappeared among the stones.

To the south of this desert, or rather this forerunner of the desert, stretches away an uneven, broken country, where, in the neighbourhood of Aïn Kerma, appear large rocks that form the considerable massif of the Jebel Selat with its flat, table-like peaks. The surrounding country remains, however, bare and barren, and only in one place can the eyes rest peacefully and with relief on a small oasis, Ed-Dis, to which the natives have conducted water from the mountains by means of underground canals, similar to the *foggara* of which I wrote in *The Fire of Desert Folk*, when describing Figig. On the stony ground outside the oasis I noticed a few specimens of scorpions with abnormally developed pincers.

Beyond this islet of vegetation and the few houses belonging to the small native colony the desert stretches on, until it passes into limitless sands, forming dunes or moving ridges that constantly threaten the beautiful oasis of Bu Saada. The French Administration long ago began a campaign against the encroaching sand and succeeded

in checking its progress by reinforcing the slopes of the sandy hills with thickets of tamarind bushes.

Darkness was falling when we at last reached Bu Saada and threaded our way along its narrow, winding streets, until the car pulled up outside an inn which had been recommended to me by my Algerian friends.

After a most comforting bath and enjoyable dinner, I strolled out, in spite of the late hour, into the little town, and then along a road that carried me through a forest of date-palms and out to the high bank of the river. Down by the water's edge two large fires burned merrily and reflected in the quiet stream. I went closer and found three women squatting there, two of them old and withered, while the third one was young and had short, thick, curly hair and large, dreamy black eyes. All of them had that swarthy complexion which is characteristic of these regions, where the burning wind lashes without mercy or pity and the merciless rays of the sun put their mark upon all uncovered arms and faces. Yet these women turned out to be neither Berbers nor nomads of the desert. When I came close to the fire, they lifted their heads and looked at me in amazement, leaving their faces uncovered and meeting my gaze without flinching.

"What are you doing here?" I inquired, though I hardly expected an answer.

"We have come to see old Rachel," replied the youngest of the women in perfect French, much to my amazement. "We wanted to consult her, for the moon is full this night."

I sat down by the fire and commenced a conversation, when I found that all of them spoke French with ease. They were Jewesses, descendants of those families who, in times immemorial, long before Islam and even before the Christian era, came into Africa and, penetrating ever further and further southward, reached the camps of the Tuaregs and the settlements of tribes dwelling along the Niger and to the north of Lake Tchad. They profess the



5. INTERIOR OF THE GREAT MOSQUE, ALGIERS



6. FASCINATING DANCERS OF THE ULED-NAİL, BU SAADA



faith of Moses, but this is adulterated to such an extent with witchcraft and Mussulman sectarianism that the religion of the old Israelite communities in Algeria and Morocco must be regarded as a cult quite distinct from the teachings of Moses.

Noticing that the young Jewess held in her hand a small rag tied in a knot, I asked her what it was.

"In this bundle I have wrapped up my hair," she explained confusedly. In answer to my inquiring look she continued :

"All my hair that falls out I collect and take to Rachel, who ties it in a bundle like this and, having performed her rites under a full moon by the light of a blazing fire, casts it into the water."

"What for ?"

"It is the purifying *Azima*, a practice which makes the hair grow fast and cures all headaches," she explained.

In this wise I made the acquaintance of Sarah bent Ihudi, and from her I gathered many interesting details relating to witchcraft as it is practised here by the Jews and Berbers alike. Through her I also made some interesting acquaintances, especially in the old district of Bu Saada, where, in a tumble-down cottage, lived a *kahina*, a real Berber witch and sorceress.

I paid the Jewess and the Berber sorceress, the first for her assistance, the other for her soothsaying. The venerable *kahina* must have laughed to herself on seeing such an eager client, full of superstition and of unflinching faith in her supernatural powers. Yet I do not lament the gold that charmed the palm, for through listening to the prophecies of the old witch I learned much that interested me, as I consulted her with tense eagerness and entered her words of wisdom into my note-book.

Prior to my expedition I had gathered as much as I could concerning the cults, witchcraft and superstitions of the natives of North Africa from the books of Professor



E. Doutté, M. Morand, A. Certeux, Moulieras, Klein and other writers and, in consequence, I knew what to ask for to enable me to form a judgment as to whether the old *kahina* had an expert knowledge of her craft or not. I have no doubt that the withered sorceress was a veritable mine, a treasure-house of Moslem magic science.

Here are a few of the remedies recommended by African sorcery for certain complaints.

The *kahina* is consulted by a sad, pale Berber woman, so grief-stricken that she has even neglected to blacken her eyes and lashes, to reinforce the colour of her cheeks or to stain her hands and nails with henna. The wise sorceress looks at her with pity and whispers mysteriously :

"Thy husband is cold to thee, *mra* (woman), I can plainly see it. Take my advice, and happiness will come thy way. Pluck a few hairs from thy husband's head and beard, take a pinch of sand from the impression of his right foot, a little dust from the inside of his baboosh, place all these in a little bag and carry it on thy breast. Be of good cheer—thy man's love shall return and with it thy happiness !"

I was assured by Sarah that a talisman of this description is always infallible. Often, after its effects have been experienced, the satisfied client returns to the *kahina*, gaudily dressed and contented, and capriciously demands from her some further charm that will make her husband yield to all her fancies and whims.

Not infrequently the witch is consulted by a young girl whose heart is aflame with love for one whom her eyes, in their yearning after unknown happiness, have beheld through her *yashmak*. Her passion is so beautiful and burning, so longing for romance—but her parents wish to and will marry their daughter to a corpulent, pock-marked date-merchant ! She must cast out, exterminate from her heart, all this love, this emotion that had come like a bird before the barred windows of a prison ; she must

extinguish the flame of desire, for otherwise her life in the merchant's harem will be difficult beyond endurance.

The maiden weeps, wrings her hands, laments her fate and begs the witch to help her. She, old and wizened, writes on the maiden's hands with charcoal or chalk the strange, terrible words "*Yakmush, Bekmash, Abhamush,*" and orders her to repeat after her :

"Oh Allah! Wrench love out of the heart of Barca, daughter of Mohammed Abd ben Gour, just as the words written on her hands are forthwith to be blotted out!" Whereupon the writing is scrupulously washed from the youthful client's hands by the *kahina*, whispering her prayers the while and appealing to Allah and the mysterious trio, *Yakmush, Bekmash* and *Abhamush*.

When misfortunes at home, in the fields or among the cattle begin to follow an unhappy shepherd, he will hesitate long, but in the end will always come to consult the sorceress. On a strip of hide she will then scratch the magic signs of the four spirits, Asaiil, Danaiil, Herkayil and Rudaiil, the powerful rulers of the north, east, south and west, and will command the shepherd to carry this amulet in the folds of his turban. These weird things, among others, I learned through the mere accident of chance on the very first evening of my stay in Bu Saada.

On the morrow, with an excellent guide, I visited this city in its oasis of ten thousand palms. When I glanced down from the balcony of my room before leaving the inn, I beheld on my right a dark forest of these palms, laden with golden clusters of ripe dates. Among the trees glistened the white cupolas and the slim turrets of mosques ; higher up, on a yellow, rocky plain, stretched the old, moribund and crumbling city of Bu Saada, now almost deserted by its inhabitants, and the Moslem cemetery. Because of the proximity of this burial-place, several families still dwell in the old city, reluctant to leave the soil containing the tombs and ashes of their forefathers.

To the right, along the horizon against the blue sky, extends, as if carved from the atmosphere, a long mountain-chain, rugged, torn and bitten by the fangs of the vicious devils of the air, of those tiny creatures with bodies of sand which come here from the far-away desert, from the great Erg, where the wind rakes the yellow manes of the sandy waves of the Sahara and where the merciless king of the desert, the simoon, reigns ruthlessly and awes the bravest hearts.

These mountains form the extremities of the Sahara and Uled Nail systems. There among the clefts in the chaos of crumbling rocks throughout the night a hyena had laughed and jeered menacingly, and at dawn a lonely jackal had shrieked.

We strolled through the city, or rather through its European quarter, gazing leisurely at the picturesque houses and villas, shaded by the verdure of gardens, the wide boulevards and the spacious square with stores and shops crowded with Berbers and nomads arriving here from the desert to spend their holidays in the local mosques and *kubbas*. The desert seemed very near, almost close at hand, for I could see an immense plain extending from the yellow and reddish mountains to the distant horizon. In the square I met a local, and now probably an international, celebrity, none other than a small Berber boy about ten years old whom an American film-producer had discovered and promptly engaged for Arab and Sahara pictures. He is now a *sidi* (sir), that amusing, conceited and prematurely serious Arab boy. He passed me with a proud stride in his fine burnous and red fez with its long, black tassel of silk and looked intently into my eyes, curious to see whether I would recognize him as one I had beheld on the screen. Though I had not counted him among the heroes of to-day to be accorded my worship, he had been pointed out by an official who had been courteously attached to me by the local governor.

After having made an appointment with this official for the afternoon, I proceeded on a tour of the city in the company of my guide. The native quarter rises in tiers along a slope that is crowned with the red-brick walls of the spahis' barracks. Here the houses are small, as usual, with blind walls and with doors let into the ground. The buildings are similar to those which I had seen in southern Morocco, where an architectural style common to the whole of the Sahara region is dominant. Over the walls were visible open verandas and galleries and flat terraces on the roofs, crowded with women and children. Three mosques with modest four-cornered minarets, ancient, narrow and uncomfortable, glistened white amid the yellowish-grey houses of the district.

The narrow, winding streets, basking in the golden sun or enfolded in the dense, dark-blue shadows, sloped down to the walls, beyond which extends the French district with the new native suburb appearing to be pasted on to it. In the little stores and workshops, owned mostly by Jews, I examined the various objects manufactured by native craftsmen for the use of the population. Jewelry of beaten silver, heavy and barbaric, was much in evidence. Especially striking were the wide armlets and anklets that were spiked with four dull nails and reminded one of handcuffs or of "knuckledusters." Such ornaments are commonly worn by native women in the eastern part of Central Africa, from where they have doubtless found their way here.

With the tour of the city completed, my guide took me to the Bu Saada River, where I had the evening before made the acquaintance of Sarah and Rachel. The river was almost dried up and trickled in shallow streams amid the stones strewn through its bed. High walls of palm-forests, tamarinds and pistachio-trees lined the banks and hung over the stone-strewn bed and the narrow ribbons of water. Through the trees where we came down to the

stream the white walls of a *kubba* gleamed in the sun. In this temple a woman-Marabout, Lalla Zineb, who was a direct descendant of the daughter of the Prophet and famous throughout Algeria and Tunisia for her great charity and supernatural powers, used to spend a few days in each month until she died some years ago.

Lalla Zineb belonged to the El-Hamel el-Hadj family, settled here for centuries, probably since the first days of the invasion of Islam into North Africa. This ancient family forms a real oasis amid all the mixed and cross-bred population of the city. In Bu Saada one can meet representatives of all the Arab tribes that range the Sahara, as well as Berbers and mysterious half-castes belonging to the tribes of Mزاب, Uled Naïl, Sidi Ibrahim, Ali ben Ahmed, Uled Khaled, Sidi Amer, Uled Zekri and others, members of the various sects and followers of false prophets. Here various currents permeated Islam, disintegrating and weakening it; here the teachings of the Prophet have been adulterated by practices of various pagan cults and of sorcery, so much so that some Berbers think nothing of eating pork or other animals branded as impure by the Koran.

The family of El-Hamel el-Hadj, in whose veins flows the blood of Fatima, the daughter of the Prophet, has for centuries upheld the purity and traditions of the Moham-medan faith and has suffered for this strict observance of the Sacred Book. Thus, when in 1849 a former water-carrier arrived in the Zaatcha oasis, then belonging to the tribe of Ziban, and proclaimed himself a sherif, that is, a descendant of the Prophet and a leader of Islam, and incited the population against the French, the then Marabout of the El-Hamel el-Hadj family supported the movement in the name of Islam. The French suppressed the insurrection, destroyed Zaatcha, occupied Bu Saada and suspended the Marabout. In consequence, pilgrims from the desert and from the highlands ceased to come to his *zaouia*. At present the family is one of the most loyal



of Moslem fraternities in North Africa, where, generally speaking, the dignitaries of Islam are in veiled, though very active, opposition to the white men, inciting against the foreigners the passions of their fellow-Mohammedans belonging to the religious brotherhoods that are dominated and led by them.

After luncheon, I visited one of the most characteristic curiosities of Bu Saada. A whole street extending between the native and the French quarters contains almost nothing but houses and *fonduks* crowded with women-singers and dancers of all ages belonging to the tribe of Uled Nail, which is the most powerful one in the region. It is a strange tribe, from the standpoint of both its origin and its cult and traditions. The men are handsome, with noble, proud features, thin, aquiline noses and statuesque, athletic figures; while the women, with light, slightly olive complexions, expressive, enigmatic eyes and beautiful features, are parasites.

The men earn their living as blacksmiths, barbers, doctors and sorcerers; the women as dancers, singers and witches. Were it not for their women-folk, who by their art often earn considerable sums of money with which they help their fathers and brothers, or bring dowries to their husbands, the men, who do not in the least object to the frivolous, often licentious life of their wives, daughters and sisters, would be beggars and wretches throughout their lives. The women of the Uled Nail travel all over Mussulman Africa, and their dances, famous in every city, are regarded as the perfection of choreographic art.

A halo of legend and myth encircles them. They are renowned as soothsayers and sorceresses, bringing luck in life's various trials and experiences. Never will they agree to a marriage with men of other tribes. Not infrequently they are responsible for tragic dramas, cruel vendettas and mad feats of bravery performed by their Arab, Berber and Kabylean cavaliers.

I personally made the acquaintance of a very venerable caid who offered the mother of a *danseuse* of the Uled Nail tribe fifty thousand francs as ransom and dowry, together with a magnificent villa, an orchard, a large estate and a will bequeathing all his great fortune to the chosen one of his heart. Both the girl and her family refused this generous offer, for she had pledged her heart and hand to a warrior of her own tribe.

My official friends who accompanied me led me to a spacious building, similar in character to the usual *fonduk*, with a wide patio and a gallery. Here had forgathered the most famous dancers and singers, about fifty of them, not counting the hosts of mothers, grandmothers, sisters and children.

We were led up to the terrace on the roof of the building, from which we had a beautiful view of the plain of Hodna, the mountains and the whole city. The walls of the terrace were covered with carpets, as was also the clay floor. After a little the dancers, who were changing in their dressing-rooms, began to appear, greeting the guests with a dignified nod of the head. The most beautiful and skilled among them were sent up to the terrace. When about fifteen of them had gathered there, sitting in picturesque and natural positions, two musicians appeared, one with a bagpipe and the other with a drum, and forthwith began to play a drawn-out, monotonous, though rhythmic, melody, which they repeated over and over again. At last a sign was given and dancing commenced.

The first one to appear was the leader of a troupe in which her daughter was also a member. She was not young, but still possessed a beautiful face with regular, noble features bearing faint traces of tattoo marks.

"Where have I seen such features?" I meditated, as I focused my camera upon her.

I could not remember at first, but gradually there rose before my eyes the classic outlines of statues representing



7. THE MOSQUE OF THE HOLY MARABOUT, EL-HAMEL



8. THE GREAT OASIS OF BISKRA



Roman matrons, exhibited in the museums and art galleries of the world. It were not surprising that the Romans, penetrating almost to the border of the limitless desert, should have left their physical traits in the blood of the Uled Nail, and that this isolated people, guarding the purity of their narrow tribal bonds, should have retained these traits longer than the other Berbers from the former Mauretania Tingitana, or Morocco, and Mauretania Cæsarea, or Algeria and Tunisia.

That the Romans knew the desert, or at least the high table-land of Africa, is certain. Even Virgil knew of it, for he thus described a nomad shepherd :

*Saepe diem noctemque et totum ex ordine mensem  
Pascitur, itque pecus longa in deserta sine ullis  
Hospiciis, tantum campe jacet.*

*Georgics, III, 343.*

The *danseuse* was theatrically attired. Her head was adorned with a golden crown with peacock feathers and chains of gold falling over her arms and with large, heavy ear-rings set with precious stones or coloured glass. On her arms and legs jingled broad bracelets, while a necklace of twenty-franc gold pieces and various other jewels and gems glistened and clinked on her neck and breast. A flowing dress of mauve silk and a pink veil, richly embroidered with gold, completed her attire.

She began with a *harraki*, which is undoubtedly a persisting element from the ancient spring ceremonies dedicated to Demetra or Adonis, a survival of pagan days. The movements of the dance are supposed to represent the grief of a faithful wife on parting from her beloved husband, the yearning expectation of his return and a whirl of passionate love when they meet again. It is, however, possible that the faithful wife and the returning husband are symbolic of earth awaiting the arrival of the warming sun of spring. Yet this dancer of the Uled Nail, though she



performed the dance with considerable restraint, did not leave a pleasing, æsthetic impression. Neither her massive figure nor her proud, indifferent features were at all suited to this dance. On the other hand, the rest of her performance was excellent.

It began with the "Dance of Greeting and Farewell," known also as the "Dance of the Handkerchief." The sad parting, the tender though hopeless farewell and the yearning of the woman left behind were beautifully expressed by the dancer. After a short pause, during which she trotted round the room, as if to emphasize the continuity of the woman's longing and of the grief and monotony of her expectation from hour to hour, from day to day, the Uled Nail, gradually changing the expression of her face and the character and rhythm of her movements, rendered the reviving hope, the joy at the husband's homecoming, the mad happiness of their meeting and, at last, the thanksgiving prayer to Allah, the Comforter. The waving of the handkerchief, slow and lingering, or vehement and triumphant, added to the expressiveness of the imagined scene.

The performance was concluded by a dance of the sword—a true martial epic, a memory of bygone days. In her outstretched hands she carried a stick to represent the sword. She fondled it caressingly, though with a profound respect that showed itself in her mimicry and in the rhythm of her steps. Soon, however, this gave place to a rapid whirl, which she danced triumphantly, with her head proudly raised and her features flaming with courage. She waved the sword, held it aloft as though to heaven, and looked intently at its edge, recounting with her movements and gestures the history of the weapon, telling of the battles in which her hero swung this old, tried and ruthless blade, whereon perhaps there still remained the graven legend:

Unsheathe me not without cause ; replace me not without honour.

At last the dancer bowed to the invisible knight and, like a slave, placed the weapon in his hands. The knight departed on his martial errand, while she remained with her face veiled in the silken *ham* and hovered silently like a yearning bird of night, anxious, grieved and sad.

The tempo changed again. She whirled in joyous leaps, for her betrothed had sent her by the hand of a slave his treasured sword, the sword of victory. With the fellow-warriors of his tribe he would return on the morrow. A hymn of a woman's pride and joy at the home-coming of her beloved bathed in victory followed the glad tidings. Tenderly she pressed the weapon to her lips, sought upon it the marks of the blood of his foes, and kissed the hilt that had been held throughout the battle by her warrior's strong and clever hand.

The old Uled Nail was followed by her young pupils, most of whom were pretty and attractive. Especially famed for her talent and beauty is Ayshoush bent Tahar, a girl sixteen years old, with regular features, a golden complexion and large, flashing eyes. Of her all the men of Bu Saada dream, even many of those dwelling in distant oases and settlements. I was told that hosts of wealthy Arabs and Berbers have vied with each other for the hand of the beautiful dancer, but that she would not become the wife of a stranger, for her husband must be none other than a good-for-nothing of her own tribe. Ayshoush carried on her neck, chest, arms and ankles many pounds of gold and silver in the shape of jewelry. She smiles but rarely; accustomed to homage and admiration, she is self-conscious, conceited and capricious.

The group of young dancers, which included Ayshoush bent Tahar, Fatima, Barca, Kadra and Fatum, performed a few solo and ballet dances, all the time singing and clapping their hands. As I watched them, I could not help recalling the dances of the Spanish gypsies which I saw in Granada. There is little doubt that the invading

Moors from Africa brought to Andalusia with them the dances of their women. The slow, expressive movements of parching Africa, exhausting the body and spirit, changed in gay, vigorous Spain into a flaming, sensual whirl—a matter of climate and of temperament !

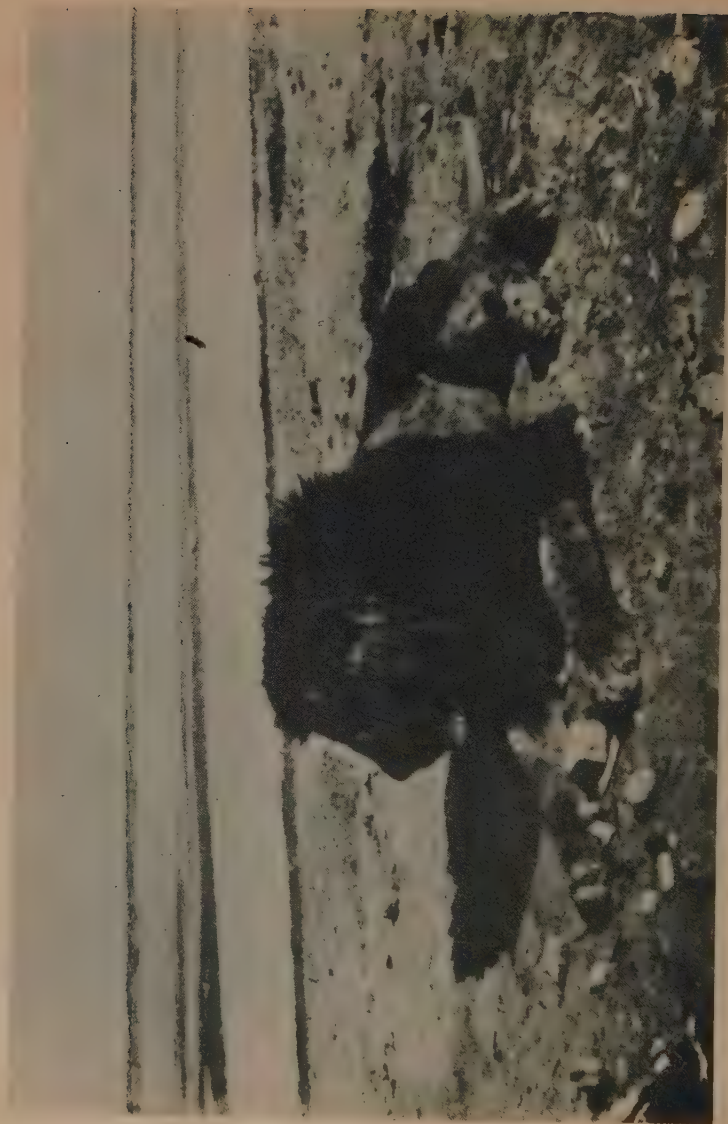
On leaving the *fonduk* I bade good-bye to the officials and to my guide and strolled alone into a Moorish café, where I sipped some excellent coffee and watched the crowd. They were all natives, drinking coffee or tea with peppermint, ~~eating~~ dates and figs and many of them playing dice or draughts. Two wandering musicians piped something on their short, appallingly squawking clarinets. In the corner sat an old beggar in his tattered rags with a basket wrapped in a strip of linen by his side. Such ragamuffins usually carry in these baskets the most venomous snakes and serpents.

I beckoned to him, and he rose smilingly and advanced to my table. Almost immediately I was surrounded by a crowd of curious and expectant onlookers, including the proprietor of the café, who spoke intelligible French. I tossed the man a coin and ordered a performance, expecting to see that of the ordinary snake-charmer, so frequently met in Morocco. However, a surprise awaited me ; for, when the Berber opened his basket, instead of the snake which I expected, there appeared a large varan, with a strap tied tightly round his neck. The other end of the strap was held by the old beggar, who pulled viciously at it to tease the giant lizard. The varan struggled violently, struck the floor with his powerful tail and at last, infuriated, began to hiss menacingly and to attack his tormentor. Whereupon the latter opened his second basket and, producing therefrom a viper, dropped it on the floor. Sighting the serpent, the lizard calmed down immediately and fixed his bulging eyes on this terrible adversary. The viper apparently realized the danger ; for, with a swift movement, it raised its head and, opening its jaws until it dis-



9. AT PRAYER





10. THE LAST LION (THE LION MARABOUT)



closed the glistening row of its venomous fangs, began to rise higher and higher, coiling its thick body and preparing to strike.

The varan did not wait for this attack but took the offensive itself, turned in a complete circle and, as with a whip, smote the viper with its powerful tail. The serpent dropped helplessly to the ground, rolling towards the onlookers, who retired in such panic that they trampled on one another's feet. The varan rushed upon its victim and, catching its head in its long mouth, was ready to swallow it alive or at least to crush its skull, when the Berber suddenly tugged at the strap and so choked the varan as to compel it to release the viper. He then calmly replaced the two animals in their respective baskets and—the performance was over! This contest afforded me strong confirmation of the native belief that the varan, or *uran*, as it is called by the Arabs, attacks and exterminates vipers. It is supposed to pursue with particular zeal the horned viper, and haunts the places where this species of serpent is abundant.

During my stay in Bu Saada I had the opportunity of witnessing two nocturnal ceremonies of the Mussulmans which appealed to me as well worthy of record.

One evening on the square before the mosque a crowd of natives gathered. Here and there smoking tallow- or oil-lamps flickered in the night wind, while at other intervals large torches threw a fitful light on the gathering. The crowd filled practically the whole square, while in the space left clear in the middle there were fourteen Berbers in two rows that faced each other.

Seven of them, with lean, ascetic features, were clad in white burnouses, tied at the waist with thick hemp ropes. Barefooted and with heads uncovered, they chanted the solemn prayer :

In the name of God the Merciful and Compassionate ;  
In the name of Him beside Whom there is no other God !

The remaining seven zealously blew their trumpets and hammered their tambourines. After a few moments the musicians began to walk backwards and were followed by the line of singers, who were facing them. Then the movement was reversed, as the singers retreated and the players advanced. This manœuvre was repeated over and over again, ninety-nine times in all, once in praise of each of the names of Allah. Each time the direction of their steps was changed, the singers chanted one of the various appellations—*Rahim* (the Merciful), *Malik el Mulk* (King of Kings), *Muhaimim* (the Defender), *Adl* (the Just), *Muhyi* (the Restorer of Life), *Nur* (the Light) . . .

When the trotting back and forth was concluded, there appeared the famous Marabout Siqi Mohammed Balkasem el-Hamel el-Hadj, the paternal uncle and successor of Lalla Zineb. Corpulent, with solemn, delicate features and a long raven-black beard, the Marabout pronounced a few words and passed his plump hand over the heads of the singing and playing Arabs, who were piously bowed to receive his blessing. With this ceremony over, he proceeded to the mosque, followed by many devout *mumeni*.

I waited for the reappearance of the Marabout, inasmuch as my guide had promised to introduce me to him. At last he came out, surrounded by mullahs and *tholba*. My guide advanced towards him, reverently kissed the lower edge of his burnous and spoke to him. When the saint answered him with a kindly nod, my guide took him by his arm and led him toward me. Stepping forward to meet them, I greeted him. He shook hands with me, but not until he had touched his hand to his chest, his lips and his forehead.

Evidently posted by my cicerone, he inquired about the subjects of my books, expressed his pleasure at my intention to describe Bu Saada, this picturesque city bearing the name of the "abode of happiness," and asked me to visit his *zaouia* in El-Hamel, though he would be unable to

receive me there himself, as he was compelled to stay in Bu Saada several days for the approaching feast of Bairam.

Following this, I asked him the meaning of the ceremony which I had witnessed. He explained that the seven *mumeni* had already made the pilgrimage to the tomb of the saint Mulay Brahim, in the High Atlas, and were now about to set out on the *hadj* to Mecca and to the grave of the Prophet. Seven musicians accompany the pilgrims everywhere, announcing their arrival to the population of the cities and villages through which they might pass on their way to the cradle of Islam.

Taking my leave of the courteous Marabout, I proceeded to the second mosque, where something unusual was also taking place, evidenced by the huge bonfire that burned before the entrance. In the reddish light of the fire crowds of natives were gathered, some sitting by the fire drying their drums and tambourines, while others were entering or leaving the mosque. Everyone seemed to be waiting for something to happen.

"Let us go inside," suggested my guide.

"Is not the prohibition of *horm* enforced here?" I took the precaution to ask.

"It is all right, for they are not very strict here," the guide reassured me.

We entered and found the vast hall scantily lit and crowded with praying forms. I observed that the *horm* is relaxed here also in respect to another prohibition, that forbidding women to enter the temple of Allah with their men-folk. In fact I noticed, among the crowds of the pious, a large proportion of veiled women's figures. As I have mentioned before, in Bu Saada and everywhere on the borders of the Sahara the strict rules of Islam are relaxed under the influence of numerous heretics and dissentients.

In a corner on my left a group of musicians stood holding their clarinets and pipes. As soon as they were joined

by their colleagues, who were drying their instruments outside, the music commenced—the usual, drawn-out, simple and rhythmic melody. In the centre of the mosque an *imam* intoned something in a monotonous, plaintive voice. The congregation sighed deeply, whispered the words of the prayers or repeated the versicles of the Sacred Book after the priest. The falsetto voice of a muezzin chanting from the minaret also found its way into the great hall.

I was already impatient to be free of the odour and heat of the mosque, when suddenly the crowd fell back and made way for an elderly woman wrapped in a dirty burnous, who stopped in front of the musicians, threw off the veil from her face and, after casting a bewildered glance on the worshippers around her, began to dance. Strictly speaking it was not a dance at all. The woman leaped to and fro, throwing out her abdomen and knees and bending her body backwards. She was not unlike a large fish standing on its tail and swaying with the current. This first dancer was soon joined by a second, who hopped about from one foot to the other, and then by a third, who trotted daintily round the space which had been cleared for them. The three jumped, swayed and whirled with a constantly increasing speed. Occasionally they were approached by a muezzin, who threw veils over their faces to hide their red, perspiring features, their swollen lips and their morbid, fixed gaze. It was not long, however, before the veils slid off, so that the staring, motionless eyes of the dancers again gleamed in their violent leaps and whirls.

An absolute silence reigned throughout the mosque, save for the heavy treading of the dancers and the clatter of their slippers. One after another the women began to pale and fall to the ground; but even there they still continued their ugly contortions. Meanwhile other dancers were taking their places.

These dances are a variation of the *riada*, or the mortification of the body, following which the medium is supposed to pass into a state of ecstasy and to receive the gift of clairvoyance. Similar dances, leading ultimately to a state of frenzy, are performed by dervishes, as well as by the sect of the Russian Orthodox Church called the "Jumpers" (*Prigouny*). Jumpers are to-day also known in many other parts of the world.

I was told that not infrequently such performances are held in the open air and are followed by a *Leilat el Gholta*, or "night of error," during which men and women surrender themselves to mass debauch and licence. Professor E. Doutté mentions that this somewhat strange custom still prevails among the Zkara tribe in eastern Morocco near Ujda. The natives of Ghenanem on the Saura River also follow the ritual of *Leilat el Gholta*.

I have little doubt that the custom sprang from mystic and religious beliefs, for some of the ritual orgies held in ancient Greece and some still prevalent in India are similar in character to this "night of error." In any case, these rites can be regarded as the last echoes of the pagan era and, from this point of view, are worthy of study and research.

During these orgies of the Moslem heretics all those taking part in them are supposed to shout the trembling, insane cry of "*Lu-u-u-u-ha!*" which is interpreted by some as the abbreviated form of the phrase "*La Illah Illa Allah*," with which words every Mussulman begins and ends his day and commences his prayers at sunset and at dawn. This interpretation offers a further proof of the religious origin of *Leilat el Gholta* and of similar rites.

All the next day I spent in the native quarter, where I watched the curious crowds. Merchants and hawkers peddled various wares and articles of food which the nomadic shepherds bought or took in exchange for wool, hides and livestock. A mullah who was evidently a



Marabout strolled through the crowd, for many ran to kiss his hand and receive his blessing. Stopping before one of the merchants, the mullah looked at him intently, uttered something and began to wave his hands excitedly.

"*Haddad ben Haddad* (you smith, son of a smith)!" shouted the enraged mullah, while the crowd which gathered round expressed their approval by unbroken hoots and hissing.

The merchant, scornfully curling his lips and laughing contemptuously, apparently rebutted the accusations of the mullah so wittily that now and again one or another of the onlookers burst into laughter, and with him laughed the crowd, which only a minute before had been ill-disposed toward the merchant.

"Who is this man;" I asked a passing spahi.

"A merchant from Mزاب," he replied with a smile.

It was only later that the full significance of his words became known to me. Mزاب is a "human oasis" on the stony desert of Chebka, which stretches in a southwesterly direction from the Tuggurt oasis on the road between Laghwat and Wargla. Geologic and climatic conditions are such as would seem to prevent the existence of human beings there, to say nothing of the development of a social order.

However, the seemingly impossible happened. In the early days of Islam the protestant element in the Moslem religion, under persecution by the orthodox, was scattered all over the world and developed its main strongholds in the regions of Oman and Zanzibar, in the Nefza Mountains, on Jerba Island and in Mزاب, that least suitable of places for any form of human activity. It was in this desert that were concentrated the heretics who demanded the purification of the Koran and the Hadith and the maintenance of the strictest rules of religious and secular life. It was not by a miracle but by great ingenuity and perseverance that these refugees were able to obtain water.

They cleared the land of sand and stones and even began to cultivate the soil and to breed sheep, goats and camels.

Within the oases small towns were built, such as Ghardaïa, Melika, Beni Sgen, Bu Nura, Guerrara and Berrian, where, in addition to their founders, old Jewish families and Berbers from neighbouring tribes gradually filtered in. This influx, however, did not prevent the aborigines from retaining their ethnographic and religious integrity. Thus it happens that they are separated from the outside world by the desert and the mountains, and from their immediate neighbours by their strict rules of life and their religious prejudices.

It is a strange tribe! Its members do not unite themselves in ties of marriage, friendship or even close acquaintance with anyone who is not a native of Mزاب. All foreigners, Berbers of other tribes or sects and all strangers are held in the greatest contempt: children run away from them and adults do not answer their questions, except, perhaps, with mockery and spite. No stranger is permitted to enter the house of a Mزابite, just as no alien is allowed in the streets of the sacred city of Beni Sgen after sunset. The women are so jealously guarded from the eyes of strangers that only on rare occasions can a veiled figure be seen hurrying along in silence, for they are strictly forbidden to speak to any one in the street, especially to men.

The Mزابites have retained the cult of the African highlands, performing sacrifices over the graves and placing in them various objects and utensils which might be of use to the deceased in their future life. Their food consists almost entirely of vegetables and dates, with meat allowed only on special occasions.

The region forms a state within a state, a church within a church. Its inhabitants ignore and hate men of other races and even of other tribes. Only the followers of their own sect, men born in Mزاب, are regarded as the pure and faithful. This prejudice has naturally brought about the

result that they themselves are hated and despised by Berbers and Arabs; yet it has not shaken them from their firm convictions, for they stand unflinchingly by their religion and by their traditions. Each child of a Mزابite must be born and buried in the oasis. In view of the fact that the natives of this strange land are able merchants and often trade in distant cities, it is not unusual to see a dead Mزابite being carried back to his native soil by his friends or his relatives.

Captain Raymond Peyronnet, in his *Races et Mœurs d'Afrique Septentrionale*,<sup>1</sup> arrives at the interesting conclusion that the inhabitants of Mزاب have retained, in their traditions, the main characteristics of the cults of Baal and Tanit and the decorative motifs of ancient Mediterranean civilizations. Continuing his ethnographic and folkloristic researches and comparisons, the author concludes that in Mزاب we find the last descendants of the ancient Phœnicians of Carthage, considerably Berberized but retaining in their blood and in their minds traces of their ancient origin and traditions. I have a feeling that, if the contempt for strangers in Mزاب could be overcome, it would be possible to study their oldest legends and myths, and thus perhaps discover further proof as to the non-Berberic origin of this tribe.

In North Africa, where, generally speaking, we meet no aboriginal pre-Berber natives, it might be possible to derive analogous conclusions by applying this method to other tribes, such as the Mlaina and the Tuaregs. Who can say? Perhaps here in North Africa we might find descendants of the ancient inhabitants of Canaan, or even those of still more distant peoples, whose existence may not have been noted by any chronicles and whose names may have perished with the tombs and buildings destroyed by time and by man.

<sup>1</sup> *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Alger* No. 99/1924, pp. 391-2.

The Mزابite merchant quarrelling with the Mussulman mullah unwittingly led me into a study of one of the mysteries of Africa, that land full of enigmas and of unfinished tales—tales without a beginning or without an end. . . .

The next morning I left Bu Saada for Biskra.

“The abode of happiness” was behind me. The car, having left the main road, sped along the picturesque and rugged mountain-passes towards El-Hamel, the seat of the sherifs of Balkasem. From the network of ravines we came out upon the road running along the river Bu Saada, which in one place disappears entirely in the soft soil to reappear again at the foot of the Jebel Gobr el-Usif. On the peak of this mountain rises the *zaouia* of El-Hamel, a white-domed mosque surrounded by high walls and by a group of buildings erected for the use of the pilgrims who come here.

In the mosque we gazed upon the tombs of sherifs, the descendants of the Prophet, with that of Lalla Zineb among them. The cedar-wood sarcophagi, carved and not infrequently gilded, with the sacrificial carpets embroidered in gold and silver thrown over them, the glimmering candles and lamps—all this added to the solemnity and quiet of the place. Before the mosque was gathered a crowd of pilgrims belonging chiefly, as I was informed by the *mokkhadem*, to the Uled Naïl, Uled Feradj and Zaïan tribes. Convoyed by a curious crowd, I inspected the home for pilgrims—a long shed divided into cubicles, the furniture of which consisted of a few planks for a bed, a little stove for cooking, a board with quotations from the Koran and the regulations of the establishment carved upon it, and a long, thin cane with which the muezzins chastise the children accompanying the pilgrims, for these younger travellers show little respect for the solemnity of the place of eternal rest of the saintly sherifs and Marabouts, who trace their origin back to Fatïma, the daughter of the great Prophet,

Though the courteous *mokkhadem* persistently invited me to dinner, I finally succeeded in taking my leave of him, and set out along the stream which winds through the ravines of the Jebel Haadit. As the road crossed a plain covered with alfa-grass and cut at intervals by dried-up streams, I had two interesting meetings with native sportsmen. First we overhauled two Berber hunters with double-barrelled guns across their shoulders, which had brought them a bag of about twenty red Barbary partridges.

A few kilometres further along the road I noticed an Arab sitting on a sand-dune with a basket over his arm and a long cane in his hand. I left the car and, with the aid of my chauffeur, who spoke Arabic well, I found that the man was a snake-charmer and was hunting for vipers. Joining him in the unusual chase, I soon found him critically examining the sand, after which he announced that a horned viper had passed this way only a few minutes ago. When he directed my attention to them I could see that faint marks of the creeping serpent were visible on the ground. We followed this trail and some hundred yards further along came upon a dark-yellow serpent with brown spots on its sides. It was at a very short range, and even then only with difficulty, that I could see it, so entirely effective is the protecting colouring with which Nature has equipped this venomous reptile. Observing it carefully, however, I could see that little horns protruded just back of the eyes, which identified it as the horned viper.

The snake-charmer pressed it to the ground with his crotched stick, then caught hold of its neck just below the head and dropped it into his basket, after having carefully wrapped it up in a piece of linen. He then set out to look for fresh trails, while I returned to the car and continued my journey to Biskra.

After speeding on across the plains belonging to the Hanamed, Zaian and other tribes, a few hours later we were again driving through the desert, cut here and there



by the various ridges of the Jebel bu Kahil and Jebel Deba mountain-chains. The road here is winding and runs through a wilderness of ravines and narrow gorges, wherein, not so very long ago, gangs of highwaymen lay in wait to attack caravans and lonely travellers. Now everything is quiet and peaceful here; there is even an inn for tourists where an old native woman, lean as a dried fish, purveys water for the radiator or coffee for the driver.

Leaving the mountains behind, we crossed a table-land strewn with fragments of rock and furrowed with dry channels that had been scoured out by fugitive streams. Then, passing the narrow gorge of El-Ksum, we were again in the desert, a yellow and grey expanse with scattered tamarind bushes or lonely pistachio-trees—the kingdom of scorpions and snakes! Up out of this monotonous desert there rose several disconnected mountains, remnants of a former chain now ground down and crushed into sand. Their peaks were completely flat, similar to enormous tables, whereas the slopes which are exposed to the winds were already concave. It is the sirocco, hurling millions of its tiny missiles, that cuts and polishes these peaks and chamfers the slopes. Great is the expanse of this desert, where death has wrought victory over life and where the levelling elements will, sooner or later, annihilate these remnants of the mountain-chain that once proudly breasted their attacks.

At last we ran into closer growths of tamarinds and rhododendrons, and shortly afterwards plantings of young date-palms, set only recently, for their feathered crowns were just emerging from the sunken pits in which the life-giving water was held. On either side of the road oases with watch-towers at their corners rose one after the other as living testimonials to the work of the wells and their screaming sweeps.

Finally we drew up at Tolga, a settlement stretching along the edge of a large palm-grove inhabited by Berbers

of the Sidi bu Sliman and Ziban tribes, as well as by a sprinkling of French colonists, officials and merchants. Just outside the town I found a plantation of blossoming *Ricinus* and everywhere through the place an abundance of wells, both of the ordinary and artesian types, producing a total of 25,000 litres of water per minute—so I was informed by the proprietor of the hotel, where I was unable to obtain either hot coffee or cold beer! Why should one drink these things when there is so much water about?

In the country around Tolga are situated the El-Bahir marshes, wherein a species of salmon is sometimes caught by the natives. This fish is reported as found in Africa only in the Upper Nile and in Lake Tchad.

To the east of Tolga the desert becomes dominant again until mountains appear on the horizon to check it, though in their efforts they are almost covered by the sand brought here from the Sahara by the simoon. Occasionally we sighted black tents of the nomads or passed slowly trudging caravans of camels.

Once within the surrounding ranges of the mountains I suddenly caught sight of the dark line of an oasis, and above it a towering white minaret and white walls. Biskra—the pearl of the Sahara, a pearl set in the gold of the desert and in the coloured rocks of Bu Rhezal and Zab.

### CHAPTER III

#### IN THE BABYLON OF THE SAHARA

*Ton amour est rude pour le cœur :  
Il a dissous la moelle au dedans de mes os,  
Il a bu mon sang et ma chair.*

H. BASSET: *Essai sur la littérature des Berbères*, p. 380.

BISKRA—the ideal resort for people anxious to recover their lost health. An immense oasis, a forest of palms, excellent water, pure air, comfortable hotels, peace and quiet, and, close by, the desert, where no germs float in the air and where the most severe wounds heal rapidly without the aid of the doctor.

The town, composed of the French quarter, the native district and the old city, can be thoroughly seen from a car in a very short time, for no tourist is particularly anxious to visit the modern Town Hall, the clubs, the hotels and the other European buildings. All this is certainly very pleasing to the eye, often imposing; but it is not European buildings you wish to see when you have travelled to the edge of the Sahara. Among the foreign features the monument of Cardinal Lavigerie is markedly striking. It is a giant bronze of the Cardinal clad in episcopal robes, with a cross of somewhat strange shape in his hands, and forms an impressive silhouette on the background of the hot, azure skies, as it seems to speak of the great might of the teaching of Christ, that teaching of love of man for man.

The saintly and energetic Cardinal established, as is well known, the Brotherhood of the White Fathers of the Sahara, and pronounced a phrase that was adopted as the first canon of the order:

“Be merciful and forbearing, industrious, just and

virtuous, so that by your example you may be able to attract to you the hearts and thoughts of the Berbers and Tuaregs. Do not hasten to convert any one to the Catholic Church ; draw their hearts to it, and the rest will come by itself."

As the Cardinal taught, so the White Fathers dispersed throughout the Sahara act. The name of the Cardinal is held in great respect by the Christian population, while the natives remember him with gratitude, and some even regard him as a Marabout.

Behind the monument one can spend a few pleasant hours in the park which surrounds the Villa Bénévent, belonging to the Count Landon de Longueville, who has caused to be collected and cultivated here almost every species of tree growing on the Dark Continent. It is a true museum of African forestry, established under the guidance of expert knowledge and at a very high cost.

Opposite the park, on the bank of the shallow Biskra River, glistens the white *kubba* containing the body of the Marabout Sidi Zerzur, who is greatly respected by the Ziban Berbers that own the surrounding country. The Marabout once held the office of judge, and his verdicts were famous for their wisdom and justice. For this reason the native judges even to-day consult the spirit of Zerzur and not infrequently bring the accused to the *kubba* and challenge him to swear his innocence on the Marabout's grave. I was told that in such cases the accused invariably tells the truth, for he knows that, should he perjure himself, Sidi Zerzur will mete out punishment to him more terrible than any sentence of the earthly judges.

Some years ago the inhabitants of Biskra were suddenly disturbed one night by the persistent roars of a lion. The following morning the women, going as usual to the river to wash their clothes and their household utensils, hastened back to the city, and, trembling with fear, spread the word that a giant lion lay at the entrance to the *kubba* of Sidi

Zerzur. On investigation it proved to be a fact that a large lion with a magnificent mane lay dozing in the shade of the *kubba*, without betraying, however, any militant intentions. At sunset the lion arose and walked peacefully towards the city, where the panic-stricken inhabitants were hiding in their homes ; yet no one dared to shoot the animal, inasmuch as the rumour spread that the soul of the great Marabout had entered the lion's body. The beast, seemingly quite unconcerned, entered the yard of an inn filled with camels, horses and mules, and, indifferent to everything around him, stretched himself on the straw and fell asleep.

Ever after that the natives of the city daily carried to the *kubba* food for the lion, and every one called the animal "a Marabout." It turned out to be blind and, when it died ten years ago, a magnificent funeral procession accompanied it to the place of its eternal rest. The tombstone placed on the grave of the "lion-Marabout" stood until only recently, when it was carried away by a flood in the river. It was perhaps the last lion living in Algeria, once famous for these kingly animals of prey. The Berbers hunted them untiringly, although they referred to them with the greatest respect, calling them *sidi*, which signifies a ruler or a master.

The filthy, dark and noisy quarter contains very little of interest in the daytime, with the exception of the market, where often immense quantities of the merchandise of the desert, dates and wool, are collected.

The palm-forest surrounding Biskra forms the natural wealth of the natives. The palm growing here bears an abundance of fruit and counts a number of varieties, producing dates of various qualities and of special trade descriptions, such as *deglet ennur*, *ghars*, *kentibhis*, *degla beida* and others. By reason of the fact that the date-palm requires abundant watering, a well-planned system of irrigation has been constructed by the natives, which is



being constantly improved and developed through the sinking of additional artesian wells. A number of small palm-oases extend around Biskra at the foot of the mountain-chain. The whole crop of dates is bought up in advance by French export houses, and the well-known firms of Marseilles have their representatives and their warehouses here.

All oases are divided into plots, separated from each other by low clay walls ; no stranger is allowed to trespass within these, and any contravention of this prohibition involves a heavy fine. By virtue of the communal system of canalization, water is conducted to every part of the oasis and is available for large and small plots alike.

In order better to acquaint myself with local conditions, I made a tour of the city on foot, peeping into every passageway of the native quarter and visiting all the small Berber villages which form the old city of Biskra. Low houses, almost sheds, built of grey clay mixed with lime and usually roofed with bundles of palm-leaves, are typical of native villages throughout the Sahara. Even the smallest plot of land is, in accordance with long-established tradition, surrounded by a wall, which typifies the great respect for ownership, which is so pronounced in this part of the world. All these hamlets, the mosques with their low rectangular minarets and the seemingly deserted *kubbas*, stand in the shade of the palm-forest.

Among the dark-green, feathery palm-leaves and the glistening giant clusters of golden and coral dates, partly ripe and partly maturing, swarmed quarrelsome black starlings, cautious and timid thrushes and wild, red-breasted pigeons. Along the banks of the ditches and channels that distribute the water throughout the oasis, small tortoises basked in the sun, while caravans of camels and long processions of donkeys and mules laden with dates plodded leisurely along the roads flanked by the low walls. Everywhere the eye lingered upon picturesque retreats, where



11. DATE CARAVAN, BISKRA



12. A DANCER OF THE ULED-NAIL TRIBE

the blue shadows of bare palm-trunks played across the pathways, the avenues between the trees and the greyish golden earth, reflecting the burning rays of the sun. Here and there natives, with the skirts of their burnouses fastened about their waists, climbed the trees and cut down the golden clusters with sharp knives and sickles. On the ground below, whole families plucked the fruit from the stems and piled it in small heaps that were later covered with mats made of palm-leaves.

In other corners donkeys and mules lazily nibbled the grass and awaited with resignation the moment when the heavy bags of dates would be packed on them and the driver's staff would urge them on to the distant market, where at almost every hour of the day or night any quantity of this "grain and gold of the desert" could be sold to foreign buyers.

In some months of the year such peace and quiet reign in the oasis that you can spend days here without meeting a human being, with the exception of some watchman guarding the fruit-bearing trees or turning the water upon this or that plot of land; but in the season when the dates are ripening the tourist can with difficulty remain long in the shadows of the oasis, even though he may have ensconced himself in the most peaceful and picturesque retreat, for there will descend upon him grey swarms of tiny flies which will settle on his uncovered face and hands, insinuate themselves into his ears and eyes and even find their way to his throat.

During the first day of my stay in Biskra I went round the whole oasis, completing my afternoon with an inferior tea at a café situated close to the ruins of an old Turkish fortress. All that remains of this stronghold are the crumbled walls, a corner of a rectangular bastion and some remnants of Cyclopean masonry, well polished by the Christian slaves. The Turks were always given to building strong, permanent fortresses in foreign countries and, with the labour of their slaves, erected them in many parts of



Europe, Asia and Africa. An example of these, rather what was left of it, lay before me, practically covered by the sands of the Sahara transported hither by that most effective carrier of these regions, the untiring simoon.

On my return from this somewhat fatiguing excursion I made an observation which I was unable to confirm either from previous experience or through subsequent inquiry. It was that, though throughout Mahgreb the talisman carried to bring luck is a "Fatma," that is, a conventionalized hand with extended fingers, in the oasis of Biskra the symbol used is a hoof.

The authorities gave me various explanations of this local peculiarity. Some of them ventured the opinion that the Ziban Berbers had adopted this custom from the French cavalrymen or from the spahis serving in the French Army; while others insisted that it was an ancient practice which originated back in the days when not only the Berbers of the northern Sahara but even the Tuaregs boasted an excellent thirst-enduring breed of horses. At present this breed is no longer found, and its place has been taken by camels, ordinary ones for the transport of cargo and *mehari*, or trotting camels, for speed.

In the evening, when I returned to the native quarter, an unusual traffic, almost a turmoil, reigned in the narrow streets and passages that crept between low houses, open cafés and *fondouks*. Walking along one of these streets, I noticed many native women with neither veils to cover their faces nor the customary burnous to protect them from man's gaze. All of them were tattooed, not only on their faces and hands but even on their necks, where the tattoo-marks often resembled the subtle design of a necklace. They loafed about the street in groups or sat on the doorsteps of their houses, singing, smoking cigarettes and *kif*, and gazing at the passers-by with arrogance and contempt. All of them had their faces painted and their black brows pencilled together into a single line.



A complete exhibition of native garments, from the simplest dark-blue shirts of the nomadic women of the Sahara to the theatrical, almost regal robes of the dancers of the Uled Nail ; a travelling museum of African jewelry, worn by different tribes and obviously carrying traces of Phœnician, Byzantine and aboriginal negro art ; an assembly of types or even races ; a Babylon of tongues and dialects—all these could be observed in this quarter, which draws to itself wealthy Berber farmers, Arab merchants from the north and the opulent and daring shepherds from the high table-lands or from the south of Tunisia, as well as the barbaric southern nomads from the Tuggurt district.

From the houses floated out the music of violins and native guitars, the dull beating of drums, the plaintive tones of the flute, strident cries and the shuffling of dancing feet. I had seen all this before in Bu Saada and in the Mulay Abdullah district of Fez, so I hastily left the place.

At the end of the street a ragged native approached me and offered in his broken French to show me something very unusual for the modest reward of fifty centimes, a cigarette and a cup of coffee. After having weighed and accepted his financial proposals, I followed the native through a labyrinth of the narrow passage-ways of the quarter until he finally motioned me to stop outside a small house with carefully closed doors and windows, although occasional gleams of light showed through the shutters. In response to the guide's knock of three short raps, the door was opened and we were admitted into a fairly large room, with silk fabrics draped on the walls and thick carpets strewn on the floor. A small table and two wooden benches comprised the entire furniture of the room, while opposite the door hung a strip of velvet with a verse from the Koran embroidered upon it.

The proprietor, a tall, broad-shouldered man with a long black beard and a perfectly white face, after making the

sign of the salaam, bade us be seated at the table, took our order for coffee and disappeared into the next room. I at once began to look around.

In the opposite corner of the room four natives sat by a table. They wore long white shirts tied round the waist with ropes and on their breasts jingling strings of Mussulman rosaries and talismans. I was struck by their deeply set eyes, their ragged grey beards and their appallingly lean bare legs. Three of them held musical instruments—a *derbuka*, a clarinet and a tambourine—while the fourth, who sat in front of the group, had his hands crossed on his breast as if in prayer and gazed vacantly into space with his indifferent, motionless eyes.

After a short interval the Arab proprietor returned with our two cups of coffee and announced, through my guide, that he was prepared to have a dervish dance performed for "the foreign Sidi," provided I would pay the recognized fee of fifteen francs. When I accepted his offer, the Arab produced a pinch of some powder from a little satchel hanging at his belt and, going over to the dervish sitting in the opposite corner of the room, pressed his fingers to the man's nostrils, while he held his head firmly with the other hand. The dervish greedily inhaled the uncereimoniously administered drug, which must have been hashish or specially prepared *kif*.

I can hardly say that this part of the performance was in any distant way related to "art," for the pale face of the dervish suddenly became purple and covered in sweat, while his lips swelled and his eyes shone with strange and threatening lights. A few minutes later he began to shiver all over, every joint, every muscle, his skin and even his hair moving or twitching with ever-increasing rapidity and minuteness. It almost seemed that at any moment the man would disintegrate, that blood would gush from his face and that his eyes would jump out of their sockets. But at this critical point the Arab proprietor returned and,



13. THE FURY OF THE SIMOON



14. A YOUNG ARAB FROM THE DESERT



wrapping the man's face in black cloths, gave a sign to the musicians, who immediately began to play a monotonous, drawn-out tune that developed gradually into a quick, whirling rhythm.

Still trembling all over, the dervish rose from the floor, shouted some unintelligible words and began his mad dance. When he came near us, I could see that his whole body was quivering and wobbling to such an extent that it was almost impossible to distinguish the outlines of its silhouette on the wall. The skirts of his long garment, which had thus far only fluttered as he whirled, gradually stood out straight and almost snapped like a flag in a sharp breeze. Then, when he whirled near us for the third time, a strong current of air struck my face, and the two oil-lamps on the wall behind us suddenly flared up and went out. In a moment the dervish collapsed exhausted on the floor, whereupon the Arab and one of the musicians went over to the prostrate form and struck the quivering body nine times with two heavy sticks. The dervish at once rose to his feet and recommenced the dance; but soon the proprietor stopped him in the midst of his wild whirls and leaps and handed him some long pins, with which the performer at once pierced his cheeks, throat and tongue, all this time continuing his mad dance. At last he rushed to the wall, leaned against it and, breathing heavily, pulled out the pins, drawing our attention, as he did so, to the fact that there was not a drop of blood to be seen, nor was there the slightest mark from the pins left on his body. The performance, however, was not yet concluded.

After handing to the dervish a glass of water, which he drank greedily, the proprietor uncovered the dancer's arm and slapped it with his hand. With piercing shrieks and mad screams the dervish began to tear the arm with his teeth until I saw a deep wound from which blood gushed. After a moment he stretched out his arm and wiped off the blood. The wound had disappeared. Following this he



seared his body with hot iron and burning peat, yet no burns or inflamed spots were visible. Finally, taking a piece of white-hot iron between his teeth, he performed another dance and then, breathless and pale, sat down in front of the musicians. The performance was over. It reminded me of similar exhibitions by whirling dervishes which I had witnessed in the Crimean mosques and also among the Mussulman Bashkirs in the central Ural region.

My guide, although he had already received his fee together with several cigarettes and two cups of coffee, would not leave me, and persuaded me to take another draught of coffee in a Moorish café where some women of the Uled Naïl were dancing. Though their performance was considerably inferior to that which I had witnessed in Bu Saada, I was compensated by hearing two excellent voices, singing melodies with which I was familiar, for they were mostly gypsy and Russian folk-songs. Surprised at this repertoire of the singers of the Uled Naïl, I sent my guide to ask the proprietor about them. When my cicerone returned, he was smiling cunningly and whispered that the proprietor confessed that the women did not belong to the Uled Naïl at all, but that he had found them starving in Constantine and had brought them here because of their fine voices. The little one with the dreamy eyes was a Jewess, while the other with the fair hair was a Russian.

Again cruel reality had disclosed to me one of the pages of the tragic book of fate of the Russian people. As I left the café, I felt that I must be persecuted by some unavoidable destiny, for everywhere that man goes there follow him, like a shadow, his grief and his suffering.

## CHAPTER IV

### THROUGH THE LAND OF THE SIMOON

FROM Biskra I proceeded on my journey southward into the desert.

Immediately outside the oases which surround Biskra extends the stony desert, dead and monotonous, a veritable land of death, save for the scorpions and venomous vipers. Even the birds have deserted this country, except for the hawk and the eagle, which come to the carrion that the desert has prepared for them. The great limitless expanse is strewn with stones and rocks which once formed mountain-chains that have been engulfed in the desert. Here and there larger masses that have not yet been levelled protrude from the surface like the ribs of a ghastly skeleton ; rugged and torn, yielding something to every blast of the wind, they fight against death and flat oblivion.

Now and again long white, winding ravines glisten in the distance. Strewn with a chaotic mass of round polished stones they extend, like giant serpents, in all directions. They are the beds of dried-up rivers which lost their life-blood so long ago that not only the oldest nomads but even their legends recall not the days when refreshing streams sparkled in these beds. The earth has absorbed and the sun has burned out these rivers to their last drop of water, leaving but the white stones in their lifeless channels.

Death still courses these immense spaces, pursuing further and ever further its grim task of destruction. It splits and tears the stones and rocks and grinds them into gravel and dust, chasing the scorpions and scolopendras out of their holes and leaving the field only to the horned vipers which dwell under the sand.

Sand, that flowing garment of the desert, mantles already the northern extremities of the Sahara ; for even around Biskra it has laid its folds in threatening dunes just outside the oasis and yearly covers more and more of the neighbouring western mountain-chain. In various parts of the Sahara there stand out in black contrast muddy depressions containing lime or sodium salts, usually a mixture of kitchen salt, carbonate of lime, gypsum and Glauber salts. The small quantity of water contained in these sinks is entirely unfit for human consumption, though occasional herds of gazelles come to them for water. In the central Sahara and even in the south, in the so-called "desert of fear and thirst," these pools are numerous. The caravans, however, carefully avoid them, for they are thought to be poisoned, because, in addition to ordinary kitchen and lime salts, they often contain considerable quantities of saltpeter, which causes violent disorders of the stomach.

When one passes a caravan of camels, journeying from a distant southern oasis across this stretch of the desert to the market-cities of the north, a strange impression is created upon one's mind. It seems as though these animals and these men trudging by their sides doggedly press on, prompted by fear and almost by embarrassment at the thought of their brutal intrusion into a land which is not theirs, into a kingdom where the sounds of the camel's pads and the echoes of human voices seem to trespass on that great silence which is always treacherous, always menacing. The camels, with their unbroken rhythmic tread, stretching out their long necks and fixing their straining eyes upon the distant horizon, seem to give an impression of inherent speed.

As the ancient inhabitants of the Sahara, these camels realize well that they are crossing the realm of a mighty ruler, who dozes lazily, as he reigns in the dead calm of his kingdom, caressed by the rays of the constant sun. But who knows at what moment he may rise in his power

and in his rage and breathe the flaming fire that stops the breath of every living being and sinks fear and awe into the heart and brain? He will hiss and bellow, until it will seem as though hosts of unseen creatures, smitten by his merciless whip, are fleeing with piercing cries of fear; and then, in the folds of his yellow robe, he will produce by magic clouds and clouds of sand, and will fling them high into the air until the sun is shadowed and the skies are shrouded with the darkness of his deadly weapon. Even stones will whirl and screech with cries and lamentation, pillars of sand will rise toward heaven, and in the din and turmoil he will rage, laughing and hissing, roaring and wailing.

Ghostly demons and fearful ghosts that lie by graves which are long forgotten, by skeletons of men and animals midst lonely rocks and in the depths of ravines, will waken from their slumbers and rage in the chaos of destruction. It is impossible then to keep a trail, to say nothing of making headway. The caravans will halt for their men and beasts to seek refuge somewhere behind the nearest rocks or under the bank of a dried-up river, and to wait in nervous fear until the mighty ruler of the desert, the flaming simoon, shall grow calm again after his storm of rage.

The pernicious effects of the simoon can already be seen in the immediate neighbourhood of Biskra in broken trees, in the sandy dunes that have crept up to within a distance of about seven miles from the city, in the sand-covered walls in the smaller oases and, lastly, at the hot salt springs of Hammam es-Salahin, which are always strewn with the intruding element. In the oasis of Sidi Okba, the streets and the flat terraces of the native houses are particularly exposed to the ravages of the desert storms.

This oasis of Sidi Okba, the ancient capital of the Ziban tribe, is a wealthy, though very small town surrounded by palm-groves. Its streets are always full of noise and activity, for, although the oasis at one time was famed for

its brave men, to-day it is inhabited almost exclusively by traders and merchants. It was here that the triumphant march of the Romans into Africa was checked. The Ziban tribe resisted so valiantly that it was only with hard fighting and great losses that the invaders were able to capture Biskra, which they named Bescara. Leaving a garrison there, they proceeded southward. However, the warriors of Sidi Okba not only opposed their advance but refused to acquiesce in the domination of Biskra, and so successfully attacked the Romans that they wiped out the garrison and compelled the Roman Proconsul to send southward a part of the Augustine Legion to quell the insurrection. After the fall of the Roman Empire, the Ziban tribe continued to rule over the country until the invasion of the Arabs, who came as the forerunners of militant Islam. They were led by Sidi Okba, the "Sword of the Koran," who swept all North Africa to the Atlantic and is said to have stopped his triumphal march only when the waves of the ocean reached the neck of his charger.

Shortly after the influx of the Arabs, the inhabitants of the oasis joined forces with the Berber insurgent, Kosail, and initiated a revolt, which soon spread all over the country and compelled Sidi Okba to return to this region to re-establish the law of the Prophet and the authority of his descendants. The great Arab soldier died in the neighbourhood of the oasis, and his body was deposited in one of its mosques, which still bears his name.

A few years later there appeared in the oasis a *kahina* who converted all these new Mussulmans to Judaism and, having incited an insurrection, fought a protracted and bitter struggle with the Arabian sherifs. One of them, Hassan by name, though at first worsted by her, succeeded in capturing her in a subsequent battle and soon afterwards beheaded her.

Later, in 1542, when the Turks invaded and occupied the whole of Algeria, a detachment of janizaries penetrated



as far as Biskra and there raised the standard of the Caliph. A year later the warriors of Sidi Okba expelled the invaders and valiantly resisted the Turkish pashas until the mighty leader of the Algerian pirates, Sala Reïs, arrived, massacred the insurgents and finally re-established the authority of the Sultan.

In the oasis the old Berbers still recount the stories of those troublous days when the mighty Salahin Reïs Sala massacred so many insurgents in the vicinity of the Hammam that the water in that stream ran red with blood ; and that is why the stream was named for Sala, as the Oriental and his civilization recognize and do homage to force alone, though it be violent and outrageous.

However, there is an essentially different Arabic explanation of the name, which interprets the appellation as meaning the "bath of the saints." But even this interpretation is closely connected with the period of unrest, for the inhabitants of Biskra and of Sidi Okba, in their revolt against the Turks, fought under the green banner of Holy War and were looked upon as saints by the local Marabouts. Apparently the germ of rebellion must have been endemic in the blood of the Ziban Berbers, for almost immediately after the occupation of Biskra by the French in 1844 an armed insurrection broke out in the oasis, but was soon suppressed by the new rulers.

In the oasis I visited two mosques, one situated in the centre of the town and enshrining the body of the warrior of Islam, Sidi Okba, and the other in its southern extremity. Both are ancient and small, with twisted wooden pillars supporting the roofs and with rectangular minarets, from the tops of which one has a beautiful view of the oasis and a part of the desert.

These mosques, as well as all the other public buildings, are very unpretentious and poor, being built of adobe and devoid of any architectural ornamentation. The most interesting element in the settlement is its market-place,

where natives of the south bring in dates from the distant oases and wool, hides and sheep from their farms. In the market one can find representatives of innumerable tribes, religious sects and brotherhoods ; here, too, one can learn of the life and customs of the Sahara. Berber, Arab and Jewish traders transact a considerable volume of business in grain, meat, cloth and gold and silver jewelry.

A stranger cannot but be surprised at the unexpectedly large number of butcher-shops, where the joints of mutton and camel-meat are so covered with flies that the meat appears almost black. Fortunately this plague of the Sahara oases appears only during the date season, when the sweet, pleasant fragrance of the fruit and the abundance of sugar contained in it attract these insects that settle everywhere in such countless swarms. The natives believe that, before the main roads were opened to the cities of the north with their pest of flies, they were practically unknown in the oases of the Sahara. From Algiers and Constantine they were brought to Biskra, from where, travelling on the backs of riders and their animals, they penetrated into the distant south.

In the market I also observed sorcerers, fortune-tellers, quack doctors and several other individuals who deserve mention. I was particularly impressed by a juggler who showed an almost uncanny dexterity in throwing knives into thin boards set up at a considerable distance, and was told that he came here from the High Atlas and belonged to the Sous tribe. This is the man who was searching everywhere for his wife, after she had been abducted by a slave-merchant at a time when he himself was away looking for work in one of the Moroccan ports, and whose story I have recounted in my book on Morocco, *The Fire of Desert Folk*.

Another individual, who was pointed out by the muezzin who accompanied me, wore a ragged brown burnous and—a pair of patent-leather shoes !



15. THE OASIS OF UMACH, SAHARA



16. THE CAPITOL. TIMGAD

"This, Sidi, is the famous treasure-hunter, Mahmed el-Kef," explained the muezzin. "If it is the Sidi's wish, we might sit down in the café, where I would tell him something very amusing."

As the heat was appalling, I welcomed the possibility of a rest in the shade and a cup of aromatic coffee—which proved to be the best I have ever tasted.

"I have known Mahmed for thirty years and I shall tell you what happened to him when we both were very young," began the muezzin, sipping his coffee. "In Biskra, Algiers, Constantine, Mazagan, Tunis, Cairo and in hosts of other cities in the north of Africa the name of Mahmed el-Kef has long been famous. Whenever, after a long absence, he appeared in one of these cities, merchants, water-carriers, innkeepers and even beggars outside the mosques stopped and looked searchingly at his feet.

"'Mahmed is doing well!' an envious one would sigh at times.

"'El-Kef is down on his luck again,' they would venture at others.

"Both conclusions followed an examination of the feet of this ever gay and merry lad—for at that time he was only a lad who counted hardly eighteen summers. He hailed from a small village in the neighbourhood of Lambèze, and from the time he was eight years old earned his own living. The career which he had chosen for himself was not a usual one, for one day, after he had eaten his evening *kouskous* in his parents' home, he casually remarked :

"'To-morrow I shall go into the wide world, for such is the wish of Allah. I am to be a . . . treasure-hunter!' Having spoken thus, he stretched himself upon his couch.

"After a moment of silence Mahmed's father, who was well read in the Books of the Prophet, remonstrated :

"'Nonsense! Without talismans you cannot find treasure, you foolish boy!'



“ ‘ Old Gunib Dhar has made me some infallible charms,’ retorted the youthful treasure-hunter.

“ ‘ *Insh Allah !* ’ sighed his mother.

“ When the old people awakened at dawn to be ready for the morning prayer, Mahmed was no longer in his parents’ house.

“ Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia, the Atlas Mountains and even the northern Sahara are as filled with treasure as the bags of a wealthy merchant are stuffed with dates and wool. People believe this because they know that across these mountains, over the plains and the deserts, there have passed in waves of conquest Phœnicians, Romans, Greeks, Turks, Spaniards, Portuguese and French. All of these were foreigners and brought or amassed great stores of gold and silver. The treasures of these ancient invaders, colonists and traders are hidden under the ruins of their former strongholds, among their crumbling graves and cities, in caves and ravines, in mountain gorges, in the beds of dried-up rivers, in the cedar-forests of beautiful Kabylia or beneath the ancient oaks of Mamora.

“ This was the hidden wealth which Mahmed decided to seek, even though he knew that he might have to look into the eyes of death or into those of devils. He began his career in the neighbouring city of Timgad, among the ruins of the old Roman town. The moment he arrived there, he hastened to the office of the custodian of the museum, applied for and received a paper permitting him to search among the ruins, and started immediately on his quest. Mahmed seemed to know well what he was about, for he commenced his search in a most suitable spot that yielded him an urn full of ancient silver coins, which he sold at a goodly price to a party of tourists visiting the place. A few days later his shovel again struck something hard and promising. Digging carefully, he uncovered the head of a marble statue. As he could not readily market this treasure he informed the custodian of his discovery and

received a reward of two hundred francs, for it turned out to be a really ancient statue.

"It was after these finds that Mahmed was first seen in the merry city of Algiers, where he appeared in a clean white burnous, a red fez with a tassel that only the Grand Vizier himself could have worn and . . . French patent-leather shoes.

"From that time everyone came to know that these shoes indicated success in the life of the treasure-hunter, while bare feet or Arab babooshes told of disappointments and shattered hopes.

"Mahmed had an artistic soul, moulded under the influence of charming legends, tales and superstitions of bygone days, which he both believed and ignored. At times he believed in them, for they gave fresh impulse and an added charm to his work; at other times he ignored them, for he knew that where a legend warned him against a devil, a dragon or a venomous snake, he should find no monsters but only owls, frogs or lizards.

"Francs were not the aim of Mahmed's life; he felt perfectly confident that before his old age he would have saved enough to buy himself a house and a plot of land, with olive-trees and vines, which should be somewhere near Mulay Idris or Mulay Brahim, so that he should not have to tramp a long distance on his holy pilgrimage. His youth, however, he wished to spend in joy and gaiety without thought of after-years. He travelled up and down the country and once even ventured into Spain; but in his native land the youthful Arab found his greatest and most powerful allurements—the dancers of the southern tribes. They sang and danced in wayside inns, in city taverns, where Mahmed scattered with unsparing hand the francs which he had won in his contest with the djinns for the treasure that lay hidden beneath their spell. He was inspired by their dances of heroism and love and by their ever mournful songs; and, staring into the whirl of move-

ment, he dreamed of heroes, pirates and kings. For weeks he idled with these dancers, dervishes, musicians and snake-charmers ; then he returned to the city in ragged, worn-out slippers, and not infrequently even barefooted.

"It so happened that one day Mahmed appeared in this wretched state in the city of Algiers. In the market he was greeted kindly and invited to a tavern—a filthy den built in a cave. Though he ate a mighty lot and drank copiously of coffee and of tea with mint, he was asked to pay for nothing, but only to tell them tales of his adventures. Finally, in the evening, when he sat before his bowl of soup after having finished his lengthy tale, he yawned and said :

" 'I want to seek for treasure here. The walls are so thick and mighty, and there are so many caves and hiding-places, that the Turks must surely have left something for me in this place. I know it well !'

"All who were there laughed heartily, while one spoke thus :

" 'That will be difficult, my friend, for the *cadi's* men will not allow you to peep into the clefts and caves, since they themselves lurk there both day and night !'

" 'What are they doing in these places ?' queried Mahmed in surprise.

" 'The daughter of a wealthy citizen of Constantine has been abducted in the night. The old father has made strong complaints, so that all the police are in the search. They are looking for her in Cherrhell and in Bizerta, as well as here, for the old man fears that they may take her away by sea to Turkey or to some other foreign land.'

" 'A woman is not a treasure !' exclaimed Mahmed. 'To search for women is not my task at all.'

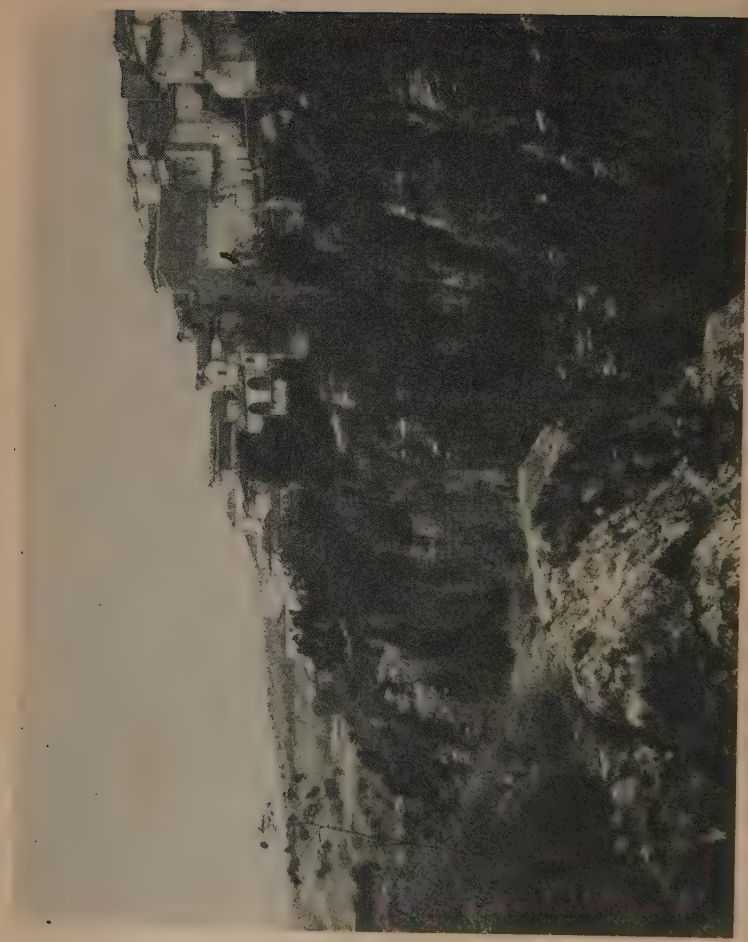
"Again they all laughed, but the lad said nothing and only pondered deeply.

"On the morrow he was as busy and industrious as a bee. He rushed about the city, looked into every odd corner, eavesdropped everywhere and finally went out on



17. PORTA TRIUMPHALIS, TIMGAD





18. AN OLD QUARTER IN CONSTANTINE



the pier which the French have pushed far into the sea, and there gazed upon the sombre, gloomy rocks that run down to the water beyond the edge of the town. Heavy billows were storming the rocks in rage and throwing into the air their white and ruffled manes. Mahmed sat down and watched the contest between the earth and the sea.

“ ‘We shall take her there to-morrow,’ he heard a voice saying, which seemed to come from behind him. He rose and stealthily looked down over the edge of the pier, where he discovered two ragged Arabs fishing. One of them was just pointing to a long cape that stretched far out beyond the city.

“ ‘No one would ever think of looking for her there,’ he chuckled.

“ ‘If only Abaley can guard her well until to-morrow,’ the other observed.

“ ‘There are so many haggard women in the graveyards now, that no one would know her from the others, be it even Sidi ben Yakub himself,’ laughed the first of them.

“ Mahmed had heard enough. He ran speedily through the streets of the port and nearly upset a barrow filled with sand, for which the French labourer who was pushing it threw a brick at him. On the hill beyond the city was a graveyard surrounded by high walls. In the shadow of the trees were many white-clad women, some of whom knelt in prayer beside the graves, while others—and these were by far in greater numbers—stood about in groups and amused themselves with idle talk and gossip, as is the custom of Arab women on Friday, the day sacred to those who have died.

“ Mahmed pondered for a while, bought a few oranges and pomegranates and, pretending he was selling fruit, made the rounds of the whole enclosure. The clever lad soon reaped the fruits of his ingenuity and effort, for he came upon a group of haggard women clothed in rags and surrounding a slim, youthful woman clad in a clean white

burnous, which could not, however, disguise entirely her shape or her charms.

“ ‘It is a good and costly fabric,’ speculated Mahmed, ‘and that veil is made of silk. It must be indeed Lutel, the daughter of the wealthy merchant of Constantine.’

“ With this decision made, he sat himself to watch them from a distance. Before sunset the crowd began leaving the graveyard, and with them went the old hags that were guarding the girl. Following them as closely as he dared, the lad finally saw her taken into a house, in front of which a fountain splashed. Mahmed made an inspection of the place and even looked about inside, where he discovered little pedlars’ booths. In the courtyard mules and donkeys were tied, and at one side there was an inn, from which the music of flutes, the staccato of drums and the cries of dancers greeted his ears. He wished to go inside but was not allowed admittance, for, as they said, the place was full.

“ ‘One place in the establishment I shall soon make free,’ thought Mahmed, as he went back into the street again.

“ After a time some women appeared on the flat terrace of the house and began to chatter, and in one of the figures, wrapped in the white burnous, he recognized Lutel. He looked at her intently, until she noticed him. Then, after having motioned to her, he went to the fountain and spoke loudly, as though addressing one of the Arabs who was drinking there :

“ ‘When darkness falls, rush into the street, and I shall do the rest in accordance with the orders of your father.’

“ The woman on the roof started, while one of the Arabs bending over the fountain-spout asked him :

“ ‘To whom are you speaking, my friend ?’

“ ‘To no one,’ Mahmed answered merrily ; ‘I just was recalling a tale that was told to me by the muezzin, Bu Akbara, of Biskra.’

“ With this explanation he drew away from the fountain and, once out of sight, ran to the inn, found his mates and

began eagerly to explain his plans. As the muezzins finished their calls to prayer from the minarets, a band of Arab boys assembled before the house with the fountain. At their head was Mahmed, who whispered muffled orders before taking up his post by the gate.

"They waited for some time, but finally, when darkness had set in, they heard the piercing shriek of a women's voice, followed by screams, shouts, the running of feet and curses. Mahmed pushed open the gate, and through it rushed the woman in the thin white burnous. His comrades began to create a panic, shouting and pushing through the crowd that gathered, while their leader hastily led the white figure away toward the harbour. Once they were well around the corner, his comrades surrounded the group of shrieking women and asked them the cause of the disturbance, meanwhile leaping about and shouting themselves as though the feast of Bairam had come.

"All this time Mahmed was leading Lutel swiftly toward the sea, assuring her that he was acting under the orders of her father. When they reached a pier near which some light rowboats were buoyed, Mahmed, without a moment's thought, threw off his clothes, swam out to one of the boats, brought it to the shore and, placing the girl in it, began to row with all his might toward the open water outside the port. After a sharp struggle with the waves, he finally succeeded in making a landing on the third of the capes beyond the town. Exploring about, he found several caves that seemed to run far underground. Sending the maiden into the one which appeared to him as most secure, he said to her :

" "Two and possibly three days you will have to remain here, for the brigands will soon be on our track. Sit, therefore, in silence and heed no calls except when you hear my name, "Mahmed el-Kef." Now I must find some food, for I am starving ; and you, my beautiful Lutel, must also

feel the pangs of hunger. I shall return before the clocks strike midnight. *Allah yaounek !*’

“ ‘The lad fulfilled his promise and was back before midnight with a basket of cold viands and fruit. When they had finished their meal by the flickering light of a small candle he had brought, Mahmed lit a cigarette and thus spoke to the maiden :

“ ‘By Sidi Bu Medin, I must tell you the truth. You have been kidnapped twice, for a thief has robbed a thief !’ Having said this, he burst into laughter ; but, when the maiden began to weep and sob bitterly, he reassured her :

“ ‘Be of good cheer, for there is a difference between thieves. The others would have sold you, and never, never would you have seen again the threshold of your father’s home. I shall return you to him, if he pays me well for the rescue of his handsome daughter. Do you understand now ? ’

“ ‘Yes, I understand it all,’ exclaimed the maiden joyfully, ‘and I shall give you a letter to my father. He is rich and will not grudge his wealth for me.’

“ ‘A letter ? ’ echoed Mahmed, and pondered deeply for a moment. ‘Oh no, that would not do. Instead of giving me francs, your father would turn me over to the police, that they might torture me until I should tell them where you are. Then they would drive me from judge to judge and from prison to prison. No, it shall be otherwise. Your father will write to us himself.’

“ ‘But he knows not where I am ! ’ she cried in black despair.

“ ‘His letter will reach us, I have no doubt,’ replied Mahmed, biting into an apple. They were silent. After a moment Mahmed lifted his head. His eyes were shining.

“ ‘I have not seen you yet, Lutel,’ he said. ‘I know not whether you are really beautiful. No one can see us here. You can cast off your veil and let me behold the stars of

your eyes, your pomegranate lips, your snowy teeth and the black arches of your brows.'

"He begged her to do this, folding his hands as if for prayer, though in his voice there was a note of command and threat. She resisted for a long time until, yielding to the request of this amusing beggar, as she thought, she removed the veil and showed her face in all the glory of its beauty and sweetness. Mahmed gazed full upon her for a moment and then whispered :

" ' Wonderful ! The good fairy from the cave of Karham. The bewitched Princess of Udaïd. The most beautiful of all beauties. Dance and sing, O Lutel, beautiful Lutel ! Grant the prayer of the man who has rescued you . . . in gratitude, only in gratitude ! ' "

"The maiden, pleased and flattered by the admiration of the man and by his humbleness, or perhaps not even regarding this ragged beggar-boy as a man, sang and danced by the light of the small candle to the music of the waves that splashed against the rocks. Mahmed sat as motionless as a statue of marble ; he looked and listened and dreamed, just as he did in dirty taverns where the half-wild women of the Uled Naïl danced and sang. When Lutel had finished, the lad was silent for a long time. Then he rose, paced up and down the cave and finally prepared a bed of dried seaweed.

" ' Now you can rest and sleep, my beauteous maiden. Fear not and think no evil of me. In three days you shall sleep, but no more safely, in your father's home. You have paid for your rescue a reward that is more to me than all the francs of the treasure-house, better even than that marble god of Timgad, a thousandfold more dear and beautiful ! I shall sit at the mouth of the cave throughout the night ; be of good cheer, Lutel, no harm shall come to you.' "

"On the morrow Mahmed, accompanied by a woman closely wrapped in her burnous, walked into the market,



where he perceived a crowd gathered before a placard on the wall.

“ ‘The merchant Ali ben Selim Rustem of Constantine offers ten thousand francs to anyone who will restore his daughter ! ’ was what the crowd was reading and discussing. Mahmed smiled to himself and mused :

“ ‘ The letter has reached me after all ! ’

“ Three days later Mahmed and Lutel entered the gate of the palatial residence of Ali ben Selim Rustem. An hour afterwards the treasure-hunter walked along the main commercial street of the city and gazed into a window at a pair of glistening patent-leather shoes. With a proud, self-conscious gait he strode into the shop and announced :

“ ‘ I wish to buy some patent-leather shoes with buttons ! ’

“ That was a long time ago, Sidi. Now we both are old, and much water has run since this incident took place in Algiers, and many other strange adventures have come to my friend Mahmed. I must bid you farewell, Sidi. May Allah have you in his care ! ”

With these words the wizened muezzin concluded his odd narrative. Turning it in my mind, I went back to the market and, searching out the treasure-hunter, looked into his face with the deepest of interest. His features were thin and pale, but they still impressed me with their energy and will, with the stubbornness of the clenched lips, with the courage of the eyes and the vividness of the imagination that had left its mark on the smooth, high forehead.

My eyes searched the whole of his figure. His clothes were ragged and tattered. The patent-leather shoes, worn-out and full of holes and seemingly so out of place and so amusing, had now a deeper meaning, for they bore witness to a sombre period of disappointments and shattered hopes of this poet and lover of romance in his somewhat unusual but certainly very distinctive profession.

From Biskra a railway runs into the desert to Tuggurt,

a distance of one hundred and thirty-three miles. Paralleling the line a caravan-route provides a suitable road for motor-traffic. The surrounding country is a monotonous, stony desert which is relieved only by salt lakes and a number of scattered oases. To the south of Tuggurt lies a plain of unbroken sand-dunes, where the all-annihilating simoon and the burning rays of the sun vie with each other in their grim task of destruction. The stories, however, which tell of caravans that have perished under the sand are exaggerated or untrue. If one does occasionally find the bones of men upon the desert, the cause should be looked for in some disease, or in the fact that an inexperienced traveller lost his way, and, unable to reach the nearest oasis or stream, perished from thirst under the merciless heat of the sun, which is, in truth, unbearable. It not infrequently brings the surface of the sand up to a temperature above 125 degrees Fahrenheit. On such occasions, the dogs which usually accompany caravans cannot travel on the sand, because it burns their feet, and have to be placed on the camels, whose thick-padded feet afford them a greater protection.

The popular story of eggs being cooked in the sand, so often repeated by geography masters of the old school who were anxious to picture the terrors of the desert to their pupils, is by no means impossible; yet an incident related by E. F. Gautier, a professor of the University of Algiers, gives a more vivid impression of this scorching desert heat. He tells us that during the battle of Metarfa, which was fought among the dunes, it was so hot that the native soldiers were unable to lie in their trenches and pits, and notwithstanding the orders of their officers fought standing, with the consequence that they fell like flies.

In this connection it is interesting to study the plant-life in the Sahara, which possesses its own peculiar flora. All the plants growing here form excellent examples of the

instinct of self-preservation and of their wonderful ability to adapt themselves to the conditions of life in the desert, where the main task is, naturally, to resist the drought of the soil and the atmosphere. Devoid of leaves, or possessing them only in an atrophied form, such as slender spikes or thorns, they collect all their chlorophyll in their fleshy branches, which at the same time serve as reservoirs for water. Although the plants in the Sahara grow very slowly above the surface, their root-systems develop rapidly and often reach great depths in search of subterranean moisture.

A traveller in the Sahara is often surprised to see the leader of a caravan stop his camels for the midday rest in a place which is wholly devoid of fuel. In his imagination the European sees already the prospect of a cold meal with tepid, stagnant water. But the Berber knows what he is doing. He catches hold of a plant that shows no more than about five inches above ground and tugs at it, digging the sand away as he works. Then it turns out that the seemingly insignificant plant possesses long, heavy roots which will suffice to heat the coffee or the tinned supplies.

In some localities, usually in ravines and mountain-passes, where the conditions are favourable for the collection of subterranean water, one finds the so-called *asheb*, a kind of grass supplying excellent fodder for animals, which is so rare in the desert. The seeds of these plants, carried about by the wind, often lie for months or even years in the clefts of rocks or underneath stones without losing their germinating power. One rainfall, be it ever so slight, is sufficient to cause rapid germination. Thus it not infrequently happens that, during a prolonged drought in a certain region, the *asheb* disappears entirely; but the wind transfers the seeds to other sections, where, sooner or later, these nomadic plants appear.

The animal world of the Sahara is similarly adapted to the climatic conditions of the desert. To start with, all

the animals and insects here are protected by a thick hide or by a shell. Some, such as the large black beetles so numerous along caravan-routes, are, according to certain entomologists, supposed to be able to form water synthetically from elements in the atmosphere; while almost all the insects of the desert are so equipped that they can penetrate to considerable depths in search of water.

In the case of the mammals, many of these, like the *Antilope addax*, are able to collect and store sufficient quantities of water in their inner organs to last them for some time. A Berber huntsman who chases an addax knows that, besides the flesh and skin for which the animal is usually hunted, he will find in his quarry a quantity of water which, though greenish and tepid, is still suitable for cooking purposes. In spite of this, however, all these animals must have sources of supply, and, since man in his progress into the African Continent has usurped all these sources, the animals migrate more and more towards the south into the region of the Niger River and Lake Tchad and to other uninhabited localities.

The famous "lion of the desert" no longer exists in the Sahara, for he, too, has trekked beyond the Niger. The same can be said of ostriches and even of gazelles and hares. Both varieties of the common Algerian hare, the *Lepus ægypticus* and the *Cuniculus algirus*, so wonderfully adapted to the colour of the desert, are very rare in the Saharan districts of Algeria. Jackals and hyenas have almost entirely disappeared from the desert, and even locusts are confined exclusively to the plains of the Sudan. The "bloodthirsty bears," so vividly described by Herodotus, have also migrated from here with the lions.

Juvenal (*Sat.* V) likewise mentions the North African bear :

. . . *quod cominus ursos*  
*Figebat numidos.*

Virgil in the *Æneid* (Book IV, 36-37) also gives testimony to this prince of the wilderness and mountains :

. . . occurit Acastes,  
*Horridus, in jaculis et pelle Libystidis ursæ.*

It seems that the theory of the oceanic origin of the Sahara is now exploded, for no bones or shells of denizens of the sea have ever been excavated here. It is only in Lake Tchad that a mollusc of maritime origin has been discovered ; but this can be explained by the fact that the lake once formed the western extremity of a great gulf that penetrated far into the continent. On the other hand, there is little doubt that the Sahara was in some previous age a flourishing, verdant land, a theory which seems to be confirmed by the unearthing of specimens of its former flora. The writings of classic authors and the native legends indicate the former existence of abundant animal life ; while the beds of dried-up rivers, along the banks of which must have stood forests with herds of animals living in them, supply additional evidence for this theory.

Although research work in the Sahara was initiated comparatively recently, several important discoveries have been made which tend to establish a connection between the former river system of the Sahara with that of Central Africa. A cursory glance at the map of the Sahara almost inevitably gives rise to the thought that all the rivers of the desert must have been tributaries of the Niger, the Nile or Lake Tchad. Even recently it was still believed that the Züsana River, which runs through the Figig oasis in southern Morocco, was an affluent of the Niger. The researches of Professor Gautier, however, established the fact that this river, flowing southward, disappears without trace in the sands of the Great Erg.

Let us turn now to see what evidence there is of any connection existing between the now vanished rivers of the Sahara with tropical Africa. In the vicinity of Biskra and



in the oases of Wad Rhir, that is, in the basin of the former Igharghar River, tropical fish of the *Chromys* species were found in subterranean waters. These fish were also thrown up in water spouting from the artesian wells in certain parts of the Sahara. There can seem to be no doubt either that they have remained from earlier times in the underground waters of the Sahara or that to-day these waters are still connected by subterranean channels with the river systems of Central Africa.

The article of Mr. Robert L. Duffus, published in the *Scientific American* for August 1925, pages 110-111, sums up the results of the most recent research on this question by Dr. Jacques Pellegrin, who examined the fishes thrown up by artesian wells in the neighbourhood of Tuggurt and discovered among them *Barbus figuensis*, *Hemichromys bimaculatus* and *Zilapia zilli*.

The fact that these fish appearing from underground basins are not devoid of organs of sight and do not differ anatomically or physiologically from fish of the same species living in the rivers of Central Africa and the Zambesi region, proves that some connection between the deep basins of the Sahara and the river systems of the continent must exist.

Describing my sojourn in the oasis of Tolga, I mentioned the salmon, which was supposed to have lived also in the basin of the Igharghar River, although I feel safe in assuming that it came originally from the quiet, muddy lagoons of the Upper Nile. In the Biskra district the famous "Cleopatra's serpent," the Indian cobra, has also been found. This reptile is typical of the tropics. Also, in a small lake lying in the bed of the Mithero River the last specimen of a Saharan crocodile was discovered, considerably degenerated, but still possessing all the anatomical characteristics of his Central African prototype.

All this led the palæontologists and zoologists to formulate the theory that beyond the Atlas there existed the so-called

Zambesi fauna, of which the most characteristic representative was the Carthaginian elephant, described by Roman historians.

Nowadays a huntsman crossing the Sahara will find little of interest there. He might sight small herds of gazelles on the distant horizon, or see a hare flit past him somewhere near an oasis, but seldom will he hear the howl of a hyena or the shrieks of a jackal, coming from among the moribund rocks. As something quite unusual the sportsman might hear of the appearance of a guepard, which moves rapidly from place to place, chasing gazelles. In the northern districts one can meet fennecs, which denizen thickets of oleanders and pistachio-trees, or a fox, lying in wait for the occasional birds that may fly past. I explored all the river-basins with which I came in contact in the vain hope of finding another lonely crocodile, but without result. My only success came in the region between Biskra and El-Kantara, where three gazelles rushed past me. I dropped a male with my Winchester with a long-chance shot at about four hundred yards, and his beautiful horns now adorn the walls of my study.

The various nomadic tribes of the desert are divided into two principal groups, which differ in respect to their tongues, their clothing, their weapons and their customs. They profess two unreconciled varieties of Islam, and there seems to be a traditional feud between them.

Each of these groups has its encampments in different parts of the Sahara. The Arabs, with the mighty Shamba tribe, occupy the eastern part of the desert and formed the main contingent of the French native troops which captured the whole of the Algerian Sahara. Their predominant religion is the orthodox Islam and their language Arabic. The Berber Tuaregs, who occupy most of the remaining portions of the desert, are their most bitter enemies. The clothing of these nomads consists of flowing garments of black or dark blue, while both the men and

women wear the *llam* over their faces, leaving the eyes alone visible. This veil is supposed to guard their souls from the evil djinns of madness, those terrible dwellers of the desert. It is not altogether clear from where the forefathers of the Tuaregs came into Africa ; all that is certain is that they have ever been a tribe of warriors and conquered the aboriginal inhabitants of the Sahara, the negroes, wherever they came into contact with them.

It is interesting to note that these nomads have retained down to this twentieth century distinct marks of the primitive civilization of mankind. Just as in earliest times, the Tuaregs still drill and polish stones and make of these various ornaments—a custom almost certainly derived from the Ancient Egyptians. Also, the axes which they use have handles of a pronounced neolithic type.

The superstition of taboo, which is closely bound up with totemism, likewise persists among them. Thus, for instance, they abstain from eating mutton and call the ram their "uncle." Their social institutions are moulded to this very day on a modified system of matriarchy, with their laws of inheritance based upon females. An uncle, and not the father, is usually the head of the family. They belong to various religious sects, retaining at the same time traces of paganism ; they are a tribe of warriors, and follow hunting as their main peace-time occupation. In this respect they have much in common with the various tribes of the Caucasus, whom they also resemble in appearance. Wherever I met the Tuaregs they invariably reminded me of the men in the Caucasian *aoûls* belonging to the Ossetes, Daghestani, Kabardines and especially to the Imeretians, who are, like the Tuaregs, excellent riders, warriors, huntsmen and bandits.

In the *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Alger*, pages 100-101, Monsieur Cauvet published a very interesting paper on the Caucasian origin of the Tuaregs, which tends to prove that the points of similarity between them and the

European races are much more pronounced than those between the Berbers and Europeans, and that the strain of Semitic blood in the veins of the Tuaregs is probably much weaker than that in the Berbers and Arabs.

Some results have also been achieved by linguistic research in this field. There seems to be no doubt that the language of the Tuaregs is the original tongue of the Berber aborigines. It is the so-called *tamashek* and contains a good many Phœnician elements.<sup>1</sup> For example, the Berbers who use this tongue have adopted a number of Phœnician words, such as *kobr*, a grave; *malaka*, to reign; *barakka*, to bless; *ben*, son; *baka*, to weep; *kataba*, to write, and many others. Even the name of the wind, "simoom" or "simoon," was probably derived from the name of the Phœnician god Simemnum, whose servants were the wind and the water.

This, of course, does not tend to bear out the theory of the Caucasian origin of the Tuaregs; but, on the other hand, special studies of the names, appellations and words used by the tribes inhabiting the Caucasus have developed strong reasons for maintaining this theory.<sup>2</sup> In one of these Monsieur Cauvet discovered a series of geographical names, only slightly changed by the Tuaregs, or "Targui," as they call themselves. From the list of African tribes bearing Caucasian names which is quoted by the author, I have selected the most convincing ones:

Sandala (a city on a tributary of the Manich River) has changed in the language of Tuaregs into Yzandaten; Sarmatians (the inhabitants of the banks of the Manich River), into Isharamaten; Tarki (a city near the mouth of the Terek River), into Tarka; Derbent, into Tarbent;

<sup>1</sup> Cf. Judas, *Nouvelle Analyse de l'Inscription Phénicienne de Marseille*. Servier, *L'Islam et la Psychologie Musulmane*. Paris, 1923.

<sup>2</sup> *Bulletin de la Société de Géographie d'Alger*, 1924, vol. xcix, pp. 290-293.

Diggor (a tribe of the Ossetes), into Diggera ; Lekh remaining Lekh ; Darghoa, into Dargo ; Tmutarakan, into Tetmotarak ; the Taman peninsula, into Taman-Risset ; Caucasus, into Ikazkazen ; Kutais, into Ikutissen ; Gillei (an ancient necropolis near Tiflis), into Gillai ; Iber (the ancient name of the Georgians and Imeretians), into Ibbaren.

It would be of great interest to study the ancient legends of this tribe, as this might yield some preserved memories of their long-deserted native lands and of their wanderings from Colchis, as that part of the Caucasus was then called, to Oëa, or Tripolitania, where these immigrants first landed, and to Phazania, as the modern Fezzan was designated by the ancient historians.

One particular custom of the Tuaregs, which is pointed out by Henri Basset in his *Essai sur la Littérature des Berbères*, seems to afford convincing proof of their folkloristic relation with the inhabitants of the Caucasus. This is the so-called *ahal*, which is an assembly of bachelors and of women with no family duties, such as divorced women and spinsters, where erotic contests take place. These, however, are quite devoid of the usual foulness and brutality of such gatherings in the East. The contestants' only weapons are their artistic talents, their satirical abilities, or their dances and music.

French writers<sup>1</sup> are unanimous in asserting that every Tuareg is a born poet, for almost every one of them composes poems on his travels, on the fight which he has had during an assault on a caravan, or concerning his beloved. Every exceptional act forms a theme for Tuareg poetry, which is often picturesque and expressive. Thus a nomad-poet, describing a beautiful woman of the desert, sings of her :

Lucky is he whose hand can touch  
Her temples and her eyes,  
Veiled in the shade of lashes !

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<sup>1</sup> Foucauld, Cavet and others.



To what heights of desire can he who sees her  
Beauty mount! What visions can he dream! . . .

Another poet sings thus :

Let it be known to all that  
The storm of love can kill !  
By Allah ! if this be so, I have  
Not long to live. The sun will  
Never shine again upon me !

And when a young Tuareg is jilted or forgotten he tells his grief in verse to his faithful *mehara*, swearing that he will never ride him forth again ; for " the sun of my day is darkened and the moon and stars of night are all in cloud."

In quoting these specimens of Tuareg poetry, I have purposely selected those which will appeal to a student of Caucasian folklore as similar to, if not identical with, the latter. Were they born here in the parched desert, or have they come to this land by some as yet undiscovered ways from the distant Caucasus, that land of free men and warriors ?

The erotic contests of *ahal* are a popular custom among many Caucasian tribes ; and it should be noted that the fondness for composing verse and satire is a strong characteristic of the inhabitants of the Caucasus, who are also famed for their keen wit and sense of humour.

For many years hence the Sahara will still attract the attention of scientists ; and now, when the tracks of Renaults and Citroëns mark the desert, the researches will, no doubt, be greatly facilitated and soon brought to fruitful conclusions. Then the evil djinns will disappear with the gazelles, guepards and fennecs ; economic interdependence will compel the Arabs to stretch a friendly hand to the Tuaregs ; and the fear and awe inspired by the merciless simoon will exist only in the legends of the past.

Glancing at a detailed map of the Sahara, we observe, on the border of Tanezruft, that " desert of fear and thirst,"



19, A WOMAN FROM CONSTANTINE



20. A JEWESS FROM CONSTANTINE

the last stronghold of Christian civilization, a small French post bearing the name of Fort Motylinski. This countryman of mine made very important ethnographic discoveries in the southern Sahara and ended his life in the desert, thus taking a share in the attempt to solve the great enigma of the Sahara, that limitless expanse of death which once surged with the life of the countless tribes that coursed it.

## CHAPTER V

### WHEN AFRICA WAS ROME

*Exegi monumentum ære perennius . . .*

TURNING back from my glance at the seared face of the desert, I came once more to Biskra, to its gaiety and laughter, to the din and turmoil of its crowded streets, spent the night there, and set out early the next morning for Constantine.

The road leads through the mountain-chain of Bu Rhezal and across the plain of El-Utaya, beyond which it winds through picturesque ravines and mountain-passes until it reaches the "Mouth of the Sahara," as the narrow bed of the El-Kantara River is called by the natives.

Near the entrance to this ravine the large oasis of El-Kantara spreads itself, while beyond it lies a small mixed settlement of the same name, made up of only a few French and native houses. Both this oasis and settlement were not only known to the Romans, but it was here that they had their stronghold, *Calceus Herculis*—a name connected with the legend that Hercules, with one kick of his foot, smashed through the surrounding mountains and thus formed the existing passage.

This military post was defended by a body of those famous Asiatic archers who also took part in circus performances and drove the wild beasts back to their cages after the spectacles in the arena were concluded. An old bridge has stood here since the Roman period, but, unfortunately, it has not retained its ancient character owing to the fact that through succeeding centuries many a merciless hand has worked upon its "restoration."

The native settlement, consisting of several little villages,



extends from the oasis to the magnificent forest of date-palms growing at the base of the mountain-chain and broken only in one place by a ravine with the El-Kantara River flowing between its rocky walls. In the belief of the natives, the peaks of this particular range form "a graveyard for clouds pregnant with rain." Monsieur Réclus in his *Géographie* quotes the popular superstition that the northern slopes of the El-Kantara mountains are black, the colour of clouds, whereas the opposite slope is pink, the sign of beautiful weather.

After passing El-Kantara the road continues on between cultivated fields, where we observed model French and Spanish farms and whole rocks of mineral salt. Deep ravines, cut down from the plain to the beds of the Tilatu and other rivers, make one feel as though some giant had cleft the earth with blows of his sword. At the bottom of these ravines deep shade and dampness reign supreme. In one of them, near the settlement of Mac-Mahon, I discovered some rather unusual dwellers in these latitudes—frogs—and an owl's nest full of eggs.

At last the car drew up in front of a garage in the town of Batna, which is an important administrative and military outpost situated in the south central part of the district of Constantine. After having refilled our fuel- and water-tanks here, we left the main road and turned off to the east into one which was to take us to the ruins of the ancient Roman city of Timgad.

On the way we passed the settlement of Lambèze, where the staff and the main force of the Augustine legion which defended North Africa were quartered for nearly two centuries. Recently remains of the former Roman camp were uncovered here, with the abrasions in the stones of wheel-tracks leading to a large building surrounded by the ruins of smaller houses and by columns that rise above the rest like tombstones to the ancient past. Over this oasis of antiquity the powerful castle, or Prætorium, stands

dominant. It is, in fact, the only well-preserved building here, for the others have long since crumbled, leaving only the foundations of houses, temples and baths with isolated blocks here and there. To the north lay the ruins of an amphitheatre and of an ancient necropolis. The distant whisper of bygone days speaks to the traveller from this historic cemetery, which bears witness to the former power of the Eternal City and to the bold ambition of proud Cæsars, those mighty rulers of the ancient world.

Close by, behind a threatening wall, an immense building with hosts of little barred windows towers. It is the strictest military prison in Algeria and is always overcrowded. When one comes upon it there, separated from the Prætorium by only a narrow road and some straggling gardens, one wonders why it was ever erected in such juxtaposition to the romantic relics of ancient Rome.

Beyond this incongruity the road continues through the ruins of a Roman triumphal arch, erected during the reign of Marcus Aurelius. Near by lies the French settlement of Markuna, the former Roman Verecunda. Its small, neat European houses are set in gardens and in the shade of orchards, while here and there among the bushes and trees appear the ruins of other buildings of this former suburb of Lambèze.

Over the neighbouring fields and along the slopes of the mountains are strewn large sections of columns or blocks of stone, carved and polished by the hands of slaves, who worked *ad gloriam Romæ*, loose bricks and tiles, glass utensils, earthenware and so on—until one comes to the immense ravine, where to one's surprise suddenly appear the ruins of the ancient Thamugadi, the modern Timgad.

It is a large city, completely encircled by mountains, except in the one place where they are cut by the corridor that carries in the road from Lambèze and Batna, which we were following. From a distance we could already distinguish two slim, high columns protesting, as it were,

to the indifferent blue skies. These were a part of the Capitol, the throne of Jupiter, father of gods and men and tutelary deity of the lands to which his name was carried by the iron-clad warriors of ancient Rome.

On entering the city, we came gradually to a stop in front of the museum. Every glance around, every step, convinced me that I was treading the very slabs of stone over which the battle-chariots of the Romans and their long, heavy, iron-wheeled wagons carrying stores and munitions were driven; for along the streets I observed in these paving-stones two deep ruts that crossed the city from end to end. I mounted the wide staircase leading to the Temple of Victory, of which the marble steps, the massive foundations, the crumbling walls and beautiful columns still remain; I wondered at and admired the public baths, the basilica, the ruins of the giant theatre and the magnificent Capitol; I rested in the shadow of the triumphal arch of Trajan and at last reached the forum, that heart of the city where throbbed its life and that of its inhabitants, ever hungry for gaiety, public entertainments and gossip.

Some Roman, who evidently appreciated fully the psychology of this distant settlement, carved the following legend upon one of the stones in the forum:

*Venari lavari ludere ridere occ<sup>1</sup> est vivere.*

(To hunt, to bathe, to play and to laugh—that is life.)

It is obvious that these words must have been carved during a period of peace and tranquillity, when the third Augustine legion had quelled all risings and insurrections among the barbaric tribes and, after having awed them with the power of their swords, led a peaceful existence not only in Timgad but probably also in such purely military cities as Lambèze.

I carefully examined the plain on which the city was

<sup>1</sup> *Occ* is the corrupted form of the Latin *hoc*.

built, but could nowhere find any traces of water. Though the natives in the neighbouring villages are compelled to carry water from distant sources of supply, we found in the Timgad ruins public baths, several fountains and a system of underground canals conducting water through all the streets and having its main arteries along the *Cardo Maximus* and the *Decumanus Maximus*, the chief thoroughfares of the city. It is an indisputable fact that, even in modern days, the district of Batna, including the city of Timgad, is most easily and severely affected by drought and heat. It is therefore not surprising that the Romans employed all their ingenuity to bring water through aqueducts from the surrounding mountains and not infrequently from very distant sources.

In this third Roman legion served not only natives from the districts around Rome and to the south, but also *cives Romani* from the northern provinces of the great Empire. What could have been more desirable for these men of the north during a time of unbearable heat than a rest in the public baths and a plunge into a pool of cold, refreshing water?

Separated here on the distant frontier of their African colony from everything that was Rome, the inhabitants of Timgad sought every possible relaxation within the limits of their city and in the surrounding country. As the neighbouring mountains abounded in wild animals, such as lions, panthers, hyenas and jackals, hunting naturally formed the most popular pastime of Roman warriors. In addition there was gambling, usually connected with horse-racing, and various other games, evidence of which is found in a sort of chess-board carved in stone that still remains in the forum. And when in time the cries and howls of the mob, clamouring for *panem et circenses*, had reached this distant outpost of the Empire, an immense theatre was built and the best actors and dancers brought to perform for the public, later giving way to the gladiators

of the Sahara, to Numidian riders and at last to wild beasts, to whom were cast defiant slaves, valiant leaders of revolts and Christian martyrs.

Laughter at last—to laugh and to forget !

It must be remembered that Rome, having absorbed, after the Punic wars, Mauretania Cæsarea, Mauretania Tingitana and the provinces of Nubia, began to penetrate with extraordinary rapidity southward into the region of Bescera, the northern extremities of the Sahara and the High Atlas. After all the Berber tribes had been conquered and subdued and no longer presented any danger to the Empire, the Senate, however, kept its legions on the borders of these provinces, where the small and undisciplined nomadic tribes were still moving their camps from place to place. Apart from sporadic assaults and occasional robberies, no emergency threatened the power of Rome from these unorganized peoples.

True, the proconsuls received information from time to time that some of the Carthaginians had, after the collapse of their famous city, migrated into the southern regions, so that hostile activities might readily be expected from their descendants or followers ; but no one ever heard anything of them, for they seemed to have dissipated into the limitless spaces of the Sahara. Thus, there was no reason why the Roman legions should cross the line of Bescera now that the Ziban and Uled Nail tribes, the last to resist the onslaught of Rome, had been conquered and subdued.

With the establishment of peace the policy of Rome was to defend her possessions and to exploit her newly acquired colony. Hosts of colonists were moved to Africa, where they were granted special privileges and where large sums were expended for the development of agriculture and for the construction of aqueducts, roads and commercial warehouses. These efforts produced very desirable results, for soon the African colony supplied Rome with grain of



all kinds, fruit, fish, timber, olives and wine, as well as with wild beasts, those *africanæ* which were so prized for circus performances. The profits which thus accrued to the Empire were devoted to the construction of new ports and cities in the colony. Thus some thirty cities were built along and near the shore, including Tebessa, Timgad, Cæsarea, Lixus, Volubilis, Carthage, Bizerta, Constantine and Cuicul, and were followed by hundreds of smaller towns and settlements that soon sprang up on African soil. The Roman government also granted land to the commanders and men of the legions and cohorts, as well as to administrative officials, in this way developing more and more the agricultural area of the continent.

Land, and especially fertile soil producing a most varied range of fruits and useful plants, always establishes a strong domination over men by rewarding them bountifully for their efforts. It is therefore not surprising that whole colonies of *cives Romani* remained here for many years and not infrequently throughout their lives. In time there grew up successive generations of African colonists who, in this great school of energy and perseverance, produced men admired and respected by Rome and throughout the Empire. Among them were famous commanders, governors, jurists, savants and poets, such as, for instance, Apuleius.

In ancient times there was a road leading from Timgad to El-Kantara. Through this "gate of the desert" the nomads flocked to sell their wares for Roman silver and to try their luck in the cities and camps of the invaders. With them came their women—proud and courageous spirits of the Atlas highlands, burning, impassioned daughters of the desert, humble slaves from the pasture-lands, all journeying here with their husbands, fathers or brothers—curious to see men from foreign lands and nursing a secret hope that by some turn of fortune they might for ever be taken from their crude and smoky tents, where they had toiled so hard and led such monotonous, wretched lives.

Not a few of them found their destiny here, marrying Roman citizens, often playing great parts not only in the life of the city but in that of the entire province, and enjoying, by virtue of the Cæsarean decree, the rights and privileges of *cives Romanæ*.

Having inspected and admired the largest and best-preserved buildings, I dismissed my guide and wandered alone through the dead city, so attractive and fascinating to a student of the glorious history of Rome.

Tramping through the narrow streets, overgrown with grass and weeds, I passed shattered façades of private houses and villas, crumbling remains of tall columns and the smashed basins of fountains. The grim work of destruction was wrought by the vindictive highlanders of Jebel Aures, who, after the collapse of Rome, plundered Timgad, pillaged private houses and public buildings and smashed the statues of the Cæsars and of the famous men of the city.

Outside the town lay the ruins of a Byzantine fortress, built after Byzantium had usurped the power of the crumbling Empire. Yet even with it she was unable to resist the swarms of native warriors or the Arab hordes hailing from the Asiatic continent.

Near these ruins I noticed a young-looking man making a landscape in water-colours. After we had greeted each other, I learned he was a Dutch painter, Van Duynen by name, who had come here from the Dutch Indies, hoping that the African sun would burn out of his blood the germs of the fever which he had caught somewhere in Java or Sumatra.

We smoked and sat in silence, while he busied himself with his sketch and I completed my notes, committing to paper the impressions and thoughts that had come to me amid the ruins and whisperings of a city where the cult of the Roman Olympus blossomed, and where the soul and pride of the mighty Empire still lingered about the crumbled forms.

Suddenly Van Duynen began to laugh and turned to me with the evident desire to talk.

"I come here often. I know every nook, every stone of the streets, every statue and every inscription. I have read everything written about Timgad that I could find, and it seems to me that I must have been born here. Often, when I wander here in the moonlight, I see ghosts wrapped closely in their flowing white *togæ*, and in them I recognize old friends."

I remained silent, for I felt that this pale, exhausted youth had begun an improvisation which would be true and beautiful, for it was born of the imperceptible voices of the stones and ruins, of the echoes of a life that had once moved here but had long ago turned into ashes and broken stone.

"In the middle of the second century," continued Van Duynen, "there arrived here a famous commander of a prætorian cohort, Marcus Æmilianus. He was born of an old patrician family whose men had often worn the senatorial white toga with the crimson border.

"The whole of Timgad, and especially the commanders of the Roman troops quartered not only in the city but in the main camp of Lambèze, awaited with fear and impatience the arrival of this valiant conqueror of the revolting tribes in the northern provinces of the Empire, where he had distinguished himself by a severity that inspired awe in the leaders of the legions and cohorts that guarded the northern frontiers. The Emperor trusted him implicitly and gave him the command of the first prætorian cohort. But life in Rome did not appeal to him, for in the capital there was no outlet for his active and stormy temperament. Cæsar, therefore, granted his request and sent him down here, where a stern and unflinching will was needed to rule the restless border tribes.

"One morning some cavalymen of the Augustine legion came galloping to the city from the Aures highlands and announced that the Imperial envoy would soon arrive.

Two hours later, when a group of horsemen was sighted from the roof of the great baths, old Aurelius Serpens, the prætor of Timgad, and Claudius Sertius, the prefect of the city, rode with a guard of honour to meet the envoy and his suite.

“Half an hour later, Marcus Æmilianus entered the crowded forum on his great charger. Surprise and amazement swept the crowd when they perceived that the famous prætorian was a youth of not more than twenty-five years, with a beautiful, almost feminine face, slightly tanned by the golden sun of Africa, dark, translucent eyes and soft hands adorned with rings and bracelets. Carefree, he sat in his great saddle, chewing a cane of aromatic sandalwood as he listened to the prefect’s speech of greeting, and kept glancing round into the faces of the crowd and from one building to another. Meanwhile the prefect concluded his speech with these words :

“ ‘Noble Marcus Æmilianus! We welcome thee to within the walls of our city, these walls which bear witness to the great name of Rome and to those of her divine Cæsars. We greet thee with open hearts and in the hope that thou hast brought to us the Emperor’s decree that he has been pleased to grant to our wives, who come from conquered tribes and nations, the privileges and glory of Roman citizenship. Long live the noble prætorian and valiant warrior, Marcus Æmilianus, our honoured and respected guest!’

“Marcus smiled and with a wave of his hand gave sign that he wished to speak. Rising in his stirrups, in a youthful voice he spoke thus :

“ ‘I thank you, citizens, for your greeting and for your testimony to my merits, which are of little moment when compared with what you, citizens of Rome, have done here among barbarians in a strange, inhospitable land. In the name of the divine Cæsar I thank you, citizens! Yet, if you think that I am come to be your guest, you are mistaken.



In Lambèze I spread before the prætor of the Augustine legion and his tribunes a document, bearing the Imperial seal, which nominates me as *dux superior* of these provinces. I am the commander and proconsul of Mauretania Cæsarea ! ' Pausing, he turned to the warriors :

" ' I bid you, comrades-in-arms, to an immediate council ! ' "

" Nothing more was said by the *dux superior*, but every one realized that something of great consequence must have happened to warrant sending an envoy with such unlimited powers from Rome, for this was done only in very exceptional and urgent cases.

" ' Does it augur good or ill ? ' the citizens asked one another. No one ventured an answer to the question, as no one could read the hidden thoughts of the youthful *dux*.

" Since the Romans practically always migrated to Africa without their women-folk, marriage with natives had become common. Rome, however, did not recognize these unions as legal, and only in exceptional cases granted the coveted *civitas* to these women and to the children born of such wedlock. Ever louder and more persistent the voices demanding the legalization of mixed marriages became ; but for a long time these voices never reached the podium of Cæsar's throne and consequently drew forth no response. At times the demands took the form of vigorous protests, and it was at such a period that Marcus Æmilianus arrived in Timgad. His coming followed in close train upon the petition for legal recognition of wives of barbarian origin, a petition which was signed by all the military commanders of the Lambèze camp and dignified by the seals of the prætor and prefect.

" It was at the house of this prefect that Marcus Æmilianus was given quarters, and it was there that his council was held.

" ' Citizens and soldiers,' he addressed the gathering, ' from to-day I am your commander and leader, and, as such, I wish to convey to you the official will of Rome as



to the petition which, to the great disappointment of the divine Cæsar, was signed with your names and sealed with your signets. The Emperor and the Senate know well that, although the barbarians are now conquered and gather willingly under the protecting wings of Rome, their souls are alien and hostile to us. There is no doubt that with the first military failure of our legions there will appear among them men who will attempt to rouse the warrior tribes against us and to destroy the great and beautiful work of Rome, the work whereon your brains and hands have laboured so ardently. Even if this should not take place, the blood of barbarians has already debased that of the descendants of Roman citizens and created a society which cannot be regarded as having equal rights with pure-bred Romans. Neither the Senate nor the Emperor can wholly trust it. It can always happen that a faithful dog may bite the hand of his master. Remember this, my friends, and withdraw your signatures from the dangerous and unwise petition. *Dixi!*'

"An awkward silence followed this oration. The first one to speak was the commander of the Augustine legion, Maximilianus Stella.

"'I am a soldier! The Emperor's will and thine, *dux superior*, are commands to me. I withdraw my sign and seal from the petition.'

"'And I! And I!' cried several centurions.

"But one of the centurions, an old Germanic slave and prisoner, whose hair was grey and whose face was almost black from the rays of the African sun and marked with wounds from Nubian arrows, stepped forward and in a grim, determined voice spoke these words:

"'I have a Berber wife from the noble family of Jerba. She has borne me five sons, all of whom are warriors and have shed their blood for Rome. They are not of inferior manhood and they will defend the glory of Rome to the last breath of life. For them I demand

the rights of Roman citizenship, and in this demand I shall not yield.'

"The brow of the *dux superior* clouded.

" 'I order thee, centurion, to withdraw thy sign and seal.'

" 'In my life in the Roman legions I have never learned to give way,' replied the old centurion.

"That same day the grey-headed soldier was taken to Lambèze and beheaded. The iron hand of the youthful commander had gripped Timgad and all the cities where the Augustine legion was quartered.

"Soon a new mansion was erected for Marcus Æmilianus, where the feared prætorian led a secluded life and received only those commanders and citizens who had no relationship with any of the native tribes. Yet the *dux superior* had his eyes and ears everywhere; he knew what was said in private in houses where Romans who had married Berber or Numidian wives criticized Cæsar for having sent this proud and awe-inspiring envoy; he knew where a wedding with a native woman was to be celebrated, and no one ever guessed in what wise the woman disappeared, never to be heard of in Timgad again. He changed all the commanders of cohorts and *centuriæ*, sending them back to Rome or to Carthage, and requested the Capitol to dispatch him men who were married to Roman women. Thus in a very short time the whole staff of the legion and of the troops quartered in the various cities was changed and formed a body of *cives Romani* of pure Italian origin.

"After Marcus Æmilianus had ruled the country for a year, a breathless messenger one day brought in the tidings from the commander of the Auzian garrison that the neighbouring tribes had been incited by Tuhurt, a descendant of an exile from Carthage, to besiege and threaten the Roman city. The commander wrote that the tribesmen had placed themselves across all the roads and canals and that Auzia could not stand siege for more than seven days.

"An hour later Marcus Æmilianus was already at the

head of his troops, marching toward Lambèze, where he was to pick up a supplementary column under the command of the prætor Servilius Regula. The troops under the *dux superior* moved so swiftly toward the west that they succeeded in bringing relief to the beleaguered city before it was too late. The tribesmen, however, fought valiantly and resisted the Romans for two days. It was not until Marcus flung against them the full weight of his heavy cavalry that the Berbers finally broke in chaos and made off in every direction on their swift horses.

"The chase commenced. Upon the plain hundreds of single-handed combats were fought, in which a native of Italy, of Greece or of Gallia closed with a savage Berber tribesman, and for one of them the duel was the last that he ever fought.

"As Marcus watched the battle from a neighbouring hill, he suddenly smote his horse, unsheathed his sword and galloped into the field; for he had marked a Berber horseman who cut his way out of a group of Roman riders and rushed onward, emptying the saddles of those who sought to head him off. Realizing that the Berber would soon escape his men, Marcus urged on his speedy charger that had so often won prizes for him in the Roman races, and soon was nearing the fleeing native.

"The horseman looked back and, seeing but a single pursuer left, raised his mount on its hind-legs and swung round to face his foe. With a wild war-cry of the desert he rushed upon his Roman adversary. A clang of swords was heard, their eyes met, and a strange thing then happened. The Berber lowered his sword and pressed his hand to his chest, while the Roman gazed at him and muttered '*Mirabile dictu!*' for the face upon which he looked was that of a beautiful woman with a thin, aquiline nose, fiery eyes and lips that were used to command as much by their power as by their passion. A wave of black hair fell upon her shapely neck; thin, graceful legs pressed the horse's sides;

behind the leather shield, studded with copper, heaved the full breast of a woman.

“For a moment they gazed into each other’s eyes—this Roman *dux* and this warrior-woman of a desert tribe. Marcus was the first to draw himself out of the unexpected mood, sheathed his sword and touched the woman’s arm. A moment later the riders who had followed their leader were around them and had raised their swords over the Berber’s head. As the blades flashed, the woman gripped her own and would have dashed once more for liberty had not Marcus interposed his orders :

“ ‘Down with your swords ! This is my booty. I take her as a prisoner of honour, for she has a lion’s heart and a warrior’s hand.’

“One of the soldiers, however, in the zeal of battle rushed at the woman and sought to wrench away her sword. It was then that this youthful, delicate, almost effeminate prætorian exhibited that strength of which stories were told in the legions where the famous Marcus Æmilianus, the friend of Cæsar, had fought. He seized the soldier by his belt, lifted him swiftly from his saddle and flung him to the ground.

“ ‘Thou wretched dog ! Hast thou not heard my orders ? ’

“The woman looked admiringly at the Roman. Hesitating but a moment, she handed him her sword, and in broken Latin, mingled with the words of her own native tongue, addressed him :

“ ‘Thou art my master ; I am thy slave ! ’

“When the *dux superior* returned to Timgad everyone anticipated a new spectacle in the great theatre. But these hopes were not fulfilled, for the prætorian kept himself within the seclusion of his own mansion and saw no one, except his best and most trusted friends. Then it soon became known, first by the municipal officials, later by the wealthy merchants and lastly by every man on the street, that Marcus summoned singers and dancers to his





21. THE RAVINE OF THE RUMMEL





22. VIEW OF A STREET IN CONSTANTINE

house, where, in the picturesque atrium of the palace, they gave performances of their art. There was a rumour that Cæsar's favourite himself appeared with a lute before his friends, and that among these the place of honour was always occupied by the Berber woman-captive, whose name was Gastar. Later, even these scant rumours entirely ceased and only on very rare occasions was the prætorian seen in the barracks of his legions or in the court. Apart from this he visited no one and no longer invited his friends to come to his palace.

"One day there arrived from Rome a messenger carrying a letter that bore the Emperor's seal and accompanied by an official from the proconsul. On that same day crowds of men and women gathered on the forum and excitedly discussed the news that the Cæsar had ordered Marcus Æmilianus to surrender his authority to the representative of the proconsul and to proceed without delay to Tebessa, where he was to take command of the legion that was quartered there.

"It was a punishment. The *dux* was in disgrace—he who only yesterday was the all-powerful ruler of the land, but who had come to sit at the feet of Gastar, forgetting the splendour of the Imperial court, the ambitions and dreams of a soldier and the habits and customs of a man brought up in luxury, among artistic entertainments where art and wit crowned sumptuous feasts of the aristocracy of blood and intellect.

"Since the very moment when the Berber woman, who had been captured in such strange circumstances, crossed the threshold of the patrician's house, everything had changed; for with her love, eternal and all-powerful, had crossed the threshold too. Here, to the rhythm of the murmur of a splashing fountain, Marcus unfolded to this woman of his choice his life and his thoughts. In finest phrase he dreamed aloud of his future life with her, when, after his African service, he would take her to Rome and

introduce her with pride to the court, where she would shine like a most beautiful star among the matrons of the capital. He promised her years of glory, replete with luxury and fame, when his friend, the divine Antoninus, should grant her the privileges of Roman citizenship, which he could not deny to the wife of Marcus Æmilianus because of his services to the Empire and their former friendship.

“Gastar listened indifferently to these tales of the luxury which awaited her. For her there was happiness enough in that he, the friend and colleague of the Emperor, adored her with the love of a humble youth, for the first time flung into the whirl of passionate devotion. To the music of his lute she danced the burning dances of the desert; she hummed the old songs that came with her from her native tents; with features clouded by awe and fear, she spoke to him of the exacting goddess Tanit, for ever demanding sacrifices of blood, for which she made return to her worshippers by granting fertility to their land and herds. And then she would tell of the god of the sun, Baal Hammon, in whose outstretched arms first-born children were placed for sacrifice in the burning cauldron below; of Melkarth, the powerful and brave; and of Esmun, who helped men against their diseases of body and mind. Under the spell of these tales of awe and horror they both knelt before the images of the fearful and kindly gods that had been set up in the atrium and offered their prayers of faith and hope.

“When a son was born to them, they brought him to the altar and committed him to the care of the sun-god, praying for his favour for this offspring of love and offering at his feet white and fragrant flowers.

“Then suddenly all their hopes and dreams were shattered, smashed into atoms, by the arrival of the Emperor’s letter. Returning to the inner court after the receipt of the news, Marcus said:

“ ‘Gastar, my well-beloved, now I know not what life must hold for me. The Emperor’s anger flared when he

read my letter begging that he grant Roman citizenship to you and patrician privileges to our son. I cannot promise you anything, for to-morrow, in obedience to the Emperor's command, I must leave for Tebessa. I cannot ask that you go thither with me in my reduced estate. Take everything that there is in this house and return to your father's tent and think of me. Life is severe and merciless ; it tears my heart from yours.'

"The woman rose and, placing her arms on her beloved's shoulders, whispered :

" ' Thou art my master, and I—thy slave ! ' "

"She pronounced these words with the same simplicity and emotion with which she had spoken them on the field of battle, when their eyes met for the first time. As if correcting herself, she added the noble words of the Roman matron :

" ' Where thou art, Caius, there am I, Caia ! ' "

"On the morrow Marcus Æmilianus, only yesterday the *dux superior* of Mauretania, rode before a train of loaded wagons headed by a carriage containing Gastar and his child—toward Tebessa."

Van Duynen thus concluded his narrative and stared vacantly off into the distance, as though he were watching the little cavalcade go over the horizon. Peace and quiet reigned around us. Green and red lizards darted noiselessly along the fallen slabs of stone ; in the dark corners of the ruins bats squealed, waiting for the sun to set behind the distant mountains ; somewhere a vulture, seeking his prey in the grass, whimpered.

I interrupted the silence with my question :

"What happened ultimately to the Roman patrician and the brave Berber woman ? I quite understand that this is a typical story of the ancient Roman colony, of the struggle for *jus connubium*, which was not applicable to either plebeians or barbarians until they were all enfranchised by the decree of Caracalla ; but just now I am interested in the fate of these two individuals."

"Then let us weave the story further," smiled the painter. "An insurrection broke out in Tebessa, a mutiny, raised by those who demanded equal rights for their wives and children. The insurrection was led by the commander of the garrison. When the rising was quelled, several of the senior Roman commanders sought salvation in flight to the south, into the country of wandering nomadic tribes. Here they established a settlement and gave birth to new generations in whose veins flowed noble Roman blood—the pride of many native tribes to this day. Perhaps in the descendants of these settlers flows the blood of the forgotten friend of the divine Antoninus and of his beloved Gaster, who had laid aside the warrior's arms and costume to take up the robes and duties of a mother, and whose prayers for peace and happiness had been heard by the Phœnician goddess Tanit."

For a long time we sat in silence. As darkness was falling, I pressed the hand of the romantic Dutchman and left him there among the ruins of the city he had in an hour rebuilt for me. On the background of the still crimson sky the columns of the capitol rose in black silhouette, sentinels that kept their guard over the sleeping ruins of Timgad, that lay wrapped in the thickening shadows of their feet.



## CHAPTER VI

### UNDER THE SPELL OF NUMIDIAN KINGS

THE following morning I left Batna to travel through the seventy-five miles of country that separated it from Constantine, one of the most picturesque cities of Algeria. As added reminders of Roman days one can see in El-Mader the ruins of the Roman town of Casæ, and further to the north, in the settlement of Zana, a crumbling temple of Diana, with two triumphal arches and a gateway leading into the court. Close by lay the ruins of later temples and of a Byzantine fortress. Beyond the Mader River we stopped before the Medracen, a giant structure shaped like a cenotaph and adorned with Doric columns, which had served as a tomb for the Numidian kings who ruled here before the advent of the Romans. Native graves and tumuli were visible here and there.

Before coming to Aïn M'lila the road wound between two lakes from which salt is extracted by both the natives and the French. North of these lakes extends the plain of Sbakh, over which we saw flocks of wild ducks and gulls of all kinds swinging in circles above the black, odorous swamps.

At last we reached some bare hillocks, from which we observed in the distance stretches of cultivated fields and forests. As we ran on, I could distinguish fruit-trees, eucalyptus, chestnuts, figs and plane-trees, though palms were nowhere to be seen. The climate here is much too cold for them, for snow is not unusual in these districts.

Emerging from the hills and forests, we found ourselves running near the edge of a deep ravine, with villas, factories and barracks stretching along both sides of the road. This

was already a suburb of Constantine. At the bottom of the ravine still separating us from that city, which seemed to cling to the surrounding rocks, flowed the Rummel River.

Surveying the city with its tiny houses under black or red roofs, its mosques, its narrow, winding streets and its innumerable streams of water hurrying and splashing merrily everywhere, I recalled that I had before me an ancient Numidian stronghold which had checked the progress of Carthaginian expansion and which had been known to them as Cirta. In the days when the Romans resolved to capture Carthage and thus to annihilate their dangerous rival for Mediterranean supremacy, there ruled in Cirta the Numidian king, Syphax. In the course of his struggle for that independence which is so dear to the heart of every Berber, he had fought bitterly with the neighbouring king, Masinissa; nor could he, as a true Berber, brook the proximity of a powerful neighbour. It so happened that Masinissa enjoyed a close friendship with Scipio, dating from the days when the Numidian king had fought under the Roman banner in Spain. Thus, when the Roman leader planned his African campaign, Masinissa undertook to attack Carthage, with whom his great adversary, King Syphax, was allied.

Years before Syphax had been a bitter foe of the Phœnicians, but was later won over to the Carthaginians by their giving him in marriage the beautiful Sophonisba, daughter of their king, Hasdrubal. The young woman acquired a dominating influence over Syphax and finally persuaded him to conclude an alliance with Carthage. Meanwhile Masinissa, having received large sums of money from Scipio, began his campaign against Syphax. On numerous occasions his armies suffered severe disaster at the hands of the allies of Carthage, but each time the king withdrew to the south among the Aures Berbers and the nomads of the Sahara, where he recruited new troops and

again repeated his attempts to besiege successfully the inaccessible capital of his enemy. The deep ravine of the Rummel River winding around the city and its steep, almost perpendicular walls formed a natural and impassable defence. At last, however, after many successive efforts Masinissa captured Cirta, not by his own strength, but in consequence of a mutiny that broke out in the garrison.

When the city fell, the victorious king hastened to his adversary's castle, where he was stopped at the gate by the beautiful queen, Sophonisba, who cast herself at his feet, kissed his robe and, sobbing bitterly, begged him not to hand her over to the Romans.

The savage warrior fell in love with Sophonisba with all the passion of a true Berber and, in order to save her life, married her. Shortly afterwards, Scipio, who was already fighting on African soil, ordered that the captured king Syphax should be brought into his camp. When the prisoner arrived, the Roman leader accused him of treason to the cause of Rome. Burning with jealousy and flouted love, the royal captive exclaimed :

"Sophonisba has wrought my downfall—take care that she does not work thine !"

Scipio realized the danger and power of the woman and ordered Masinissa to bring her unto him. The Numidian, knowing well that he would never see her again, in his despair sent her a cup of poisoned wine.

On one of the frescoes at Pompeii the painter represents the scene where Sophonisba empties the deadly cup, looking into the stern features of a man who stands before her. Another figure in a Numidian diadem bends over her with his hand placed caressingly on her shoulder. Historians have recognized in the beautiful woman the unhappy daughter of Hasdrubal, in the care-worn figure bending over her the king of the Numidians, Masinissa, and in the stern Roman warrior Scipio. The scene, however, is historically incorrect ; for, according to tradition, neither Masinissa

nor the Roman leader was present when Sophonisba drank the poison.

This dramatic episode is not the only one of its kind connected with the history of Cirta, later renamed Constantine. During the reigns of numerous Arab and Berber dynasties and under the rule of Byzantium and Turkey, religious and political fanaticism flourished in the city, plots were hatched and blood was for ever flowing down its streets.

By the bridge of Sidi Rashed over the Rummel we entered the city, crossed numerous native streets and wide boulevards of French construction and at last arrived at the Place de Nemours. Somewhere near this square there should be a hotel, which had been recommended to me by my friends ; but my car, which had run smoothly across the desert and had carried me unfalteringly from Biskra to Constantine, suddenly groaned suspiciously, wheezed and stopped. It refused to move another inch.

" Is it very far to the hotel ? " I asked my chauffeur.

With a despairing nod of his head he indicated a large building bearing the name of the hotel which I sought. Leaving the car amid a dense crowd of curious onlookers, I walked towards the building, counting my steps as I went. The treacherous engine had stopped exactly thirty-three yards before the end of our journey !

The district immediately contiguous to the ravine is filled with old native houses, with mosques and minarets towering above them. It is interlaced by a labyrinth of streets that are often so narrow that pedestrians pass one another with difficulty. Many of these wind and climb upward, and are lined with old sheds which once probably served as defensive forts but are now converted into warehouses.

The interiors of the native houses in Constantine are not so jealously guarded from the curiosity of passers-by as they are in other North African cities. Women, too, seem

to be more careless of the public gaze, for, though they wear their veils, the *ltams* of Constantine are so light and transparent that not only the eyes but also the features can be clearly seen through them.

Nearer the river the native houses become lower and smaller and are inhabited by workmen and artisans, who dwell together according to their various trades. In the centre of the district the honoured professions are housed, such as the jewellers, tailors, bootmakers, bakers and weavers ; while further down the slope dwell the butchers, dyers, coopers and water-carriers ; and last of all the blacksmiths, despised by all Berbers alike. Throughout the whole area one also finds eating-houses and taverns, crowded, black with smoke and resounding with music, songs and the shuffle of dancing feet. At night a dance is often performed in these taverns which bears all the traces of a pagan orgy. Perhaps it has persisted here in ancient Cirta from the days when it was first introduced from Carthage by a priestess of the fearful goddess Tanit.

The native quarter surrounds the former fortress, or *kasba*, and joins Chara, which is the Jewish quarter. The picturesque Jewesses, with their yellow, bizarre headgear, their multi-coloured shawls thrown nonchalantly over their shoulders and their beautiful faces with flaming, dreamy eyes and full lips, conjured up memories of Judith, Salome or the tragic queen of this city, Sophonisba, who brought misfortune to him who offered her his heart.

I saw crowds of them, young and old, flocking to the Hebrew cemetery, which lies beyond the ravine. As I watched them before the shattered, crumbling tombstones in the grove just opposite Chara, where they sat huddled and gloomy by the graves of those who had long since passed away, it seemed to me that the merciless *Parcæ*, those mysterious spinners of human life, had gathered here in this secluded place to carry through the work of destiny. Their men-folk usually don European clothes and form



noisy gatherings, so different from those tragic Jews of Morocco with their Biblical robes and their black berrettas.

Near the line of demarcation between the Jewish and native quarters towers the tall, modern *Medersa*. The mosques of Jama el-Kebir, Sidi Laghdar and Sidi el-Kettani, as well as the Hadj Ahmed Palace, attract some attention, as they are in a way relics of ancient days. There is also another mosque, the so-called Jama Suk er-Rezel, which has been very primitively remodelled into the Cathedral of the Holy Virgin and still retains the distinct traces of Mussulman mosques in the Turkish style.

However, after what I had seen in the old temples of Morocco and in Algiers, these mosques made little impression on me, for they are neither beautiful nor ancient in the proper sense of the word, since the city has been destroyed and reconstructed again on many occasions during its stormy historical life. Practically no evidences have been left of the Phœnicians, Romans or Byzantines, or of the Arab and Berber dynasties. The oldest architectural relics can seldom be traced even as far back as the first period of the Turkish rule. Each year the city takes on a more and more pronounced French character, from the streets and squares to the bridges, such as the Sidi Rashed, Sidi Messid and others that span the ravine.

An interesting story concerning the construction of these bridges was recounted to me by the guide with whom I explored the city.

On a rock at the bottom of the Rummel ravine there is a mosque consecrated to the memory of Sidi Rashed, a Marabout famous throughout Algeria. There is a legend that anyone who shall raise his hand against this mosque will bring disaster upon his head.

Some years ago a sawmill was erected on the rock by an American business man, who purchased the necessary ground from the authorities of the mosque. In a very

short time the American became bankrupt and, I was told, finally committed suicide.

The French engineer who was to construct the bridge over the ravine at this point had planned to place a pillar on the rock of Sidi Rashed ; but when some one recounted the legend to him, he altered his original plans and substituted an arched span that carried the structure over the rock. It was not the fear of the collapse of the bridge or some other disaster that prompted the engineer to alter his design, but it was a purely political motive and that deep understanding of the psychology and fanaticism of the Mussulmans, so characteristic of the French, which inspired him. By such simple devices as this the French secure many lasting friends among their Moslem subjects.

My guide, who told me of this legend, was a tall, robust Berber, who, as it will appear, had himself a very definite opinion regarding this Sidi Rashed. I did not like him at first, for his arrogant and brutal face inspired little confidence in me. However, during our lengthy excursions I became reconciled to him, and quite by chance uncovered his story. Although his full name stands in my notebook, I shall preserve his anonymity, for I am not certain that he would desire me to publish the trials and experiences of his personal life.

One day, while I was wandering through the city with him, I felt the need of rest and asked him to take me to the nearest café. As he suggested a European establishment in response, I protested, in that I preferred to see a native, Moorish tavern. To this he was glad to agree, and immediately escorted me to a friend who was the proprietor of an hotel chiefly inhabited by wealthy students of the *Medersa*.

Shortly after coffee was served, the proprietor himself entered and joined us. Throughout the talk I had with him I noticed that my guide was looking intently out through the window that opened on the garden and that his eyes seemed strangely animated and fiery. Following the direc-

tion of his gaze, I beheld, on the parapet of a marble fountain, a young and very pretty Jewess, in front of whom stood a Berber, or an Arab, looking intently into her eyes. They were apparently speaking seriously, for at times the man bent over her and touched her hand and the girl's face became animated and flushed.

Just at this point the proprietor offered to show me around his house and point out the various souvenirs which he had brought back from his three pilgrimages to Mecca and Medina. There were scenes representing the Holy Kaaba and the grave of the Prophet, embroidered on velvet, illuminated versicles from the Koran, sacred books in costly covers, vessels containing earth on which the Prophet's feet had trod and a pilgrim's staff.

After leaving the hospitable Arab, who would accept no pay for the coffee, we walked back through the crowded native quarter. At intervals my companion sighed mournfully and once even moaned, as though in pain.

"What is troubling you?" I inquired.

"Ah me!" he answered, waving his hand as if in despair; "I have just seen something which reminded me of my old, trying days." He sighed and walked on in silence.

"Surely that pretty couple in the yard could not have given rise to bitter thoughts?" I suggested.

"Oh yes, they did, for they reminded me of my own life."

The arrogant face of the guide was changed almost beyond recognition. It even seemed to me suddenly to have become thin and drawn, with new wrinkles around the temples and mouth. His eyes seemed to have grown bigger and to have taken on a look of despair and yearning.

I did not press my questions any further, for I realized that here was truth, tormenting and merciless. He, however, as if prompted by the thoughts that were wakening in his mind, bent toward me and began to speak quickly:

"I was married, sir, some five years ago. Before that I had been a steward on a passenger-boat. One day, sailing

from Calais to Tangier, I met a beautiful Englishwoman. Her hair was like gold, her eyes like the water in the sea, and her teeth, when she laughed, glistened like the most precious of pearls. A great and unexpected happiness came to me, for she fell in love with me and became my wife. During two years I thought that Allah had taken me alive to Paradise, for each day carried a fuller measure of joy and happiness for me than the one before. But suddenly all this changed, and she began to despise me—the promptings of alien blood! Nothing would appease her, though I kissed the ground her feet had pressed, prayed to her as unto Allah and wept bitterly throughout the night. She left me without a farewell, perhaps without grief or even without lasting memories of me. I plunged a knife into my breast. . . . Can you see it, sir? ”

With trembling fingers he unbuttoned his shirt and showed me a narrow, reddened scar.

“ This wound opens sometimes,” he continued, “ but it is nothing compared with the wound that has not healed in my heart. Every street, every building, every tree in this city reminds me of her. . . . When I walk on this pavement I feel as if I stepped on scorching irons, for with my feet I touch the ground where she once walked. I cannot live here, sir . . . I cannot ! ”

He pulled his fez off his head and began to wail and lament, so that several passers-by watched us in amazement. The Arab was in despair, his soul was tormented by grief and yearning. A moment later, as we came to the bridge of Sidi Rashed, he turned to me and said :

“ That *wali* is a cruel tormentor ! ”

I looked at him in surprise.

“ It is true,” he continued, clenching his fists. “ Everyone knows, of course, that he lived here during an epidemic which devoured hundreds of our people. Death took wives from their husbands, children from their mothers and parents from their sons. It lasted so long that the

inhabitants of Constantine went *en masse* to seek the help of Sidi Rashed.

“ ‘ Save us ! ’ they cried. ‘ If there is an Allah in heaven He should help us now in these days of disaster and calamity. ’

“ The old Marabout then mounted the rock, raised his arms to heaven and prayed :

“ ‘ Allah the Merciful, Allah who defendeth us ! Unto Thee I bear the tears and prayers of my brothers and sisters, for they are smitten by suffering and despair. Evil djinns and foul disease torment Thy people. Strengthen their hearts, poisoned with doubt, and show Thy might, O Allah, Thou who art our Judge and our Law ! ’

“ At that moment a giant, wrapped in a black burnous, appeared on the edge of the ravine and, with a cry that was not of man, plunged into the abyss. It was the ruler of evil spirits, leaving the city at the command of Allah.

“ Though Sidi Rashed is supposed to be the consoler of those who suffer and of those who are in despair, I have beaten my head against his tomb for days and nights, praying to him for consolation, but none has come to me ; only a still greater torture and a still greater yearning have gripped me.”

He caught hold of my arm and pressed it hard, looking imploringly into my eyes.

The next morning I was already on my way toward that sea whereon he had found his brief happiness and his life-long grief.



## CHAPTER VII

### THE MEDITERRANEAN OF ST. AUGUSTINE

ABOUT seventy-five miles separate Constantine from Bona on the Mediterranean, if one travels via Guelma. One meets traces of Roman colonization everywhere along this route, for in ancient days the whole of this region formed one of the chief spheres of activity for Roman administrators and their legions. Everywhere—in ravines, on the *kubba*-crowned hills and in the plains covered with pastures or cultivated fields—one feels the influence of the ancient civilization in its masterful effort to connect this sun-scorched land with that great arena where civilized man fought the barbarian and his customs for welfare, culture and ephemeral happiness.

On my way through Hammam Meskoutin I stopped at Aquæ Tibilitanæ, an active ferro-carbonaceous spring to which crowds of Europeans and natives now resort and which was already famous in Roman days. The steam shooting up from the spring was visible for a considerable distance, for the temperature of the water reaches approximately 205 degrees Fahrenheit. In places the surplus of lime-salts in the water forms colonnades of stalactites, fantastic galleries, pointed needles or spacious terraces.

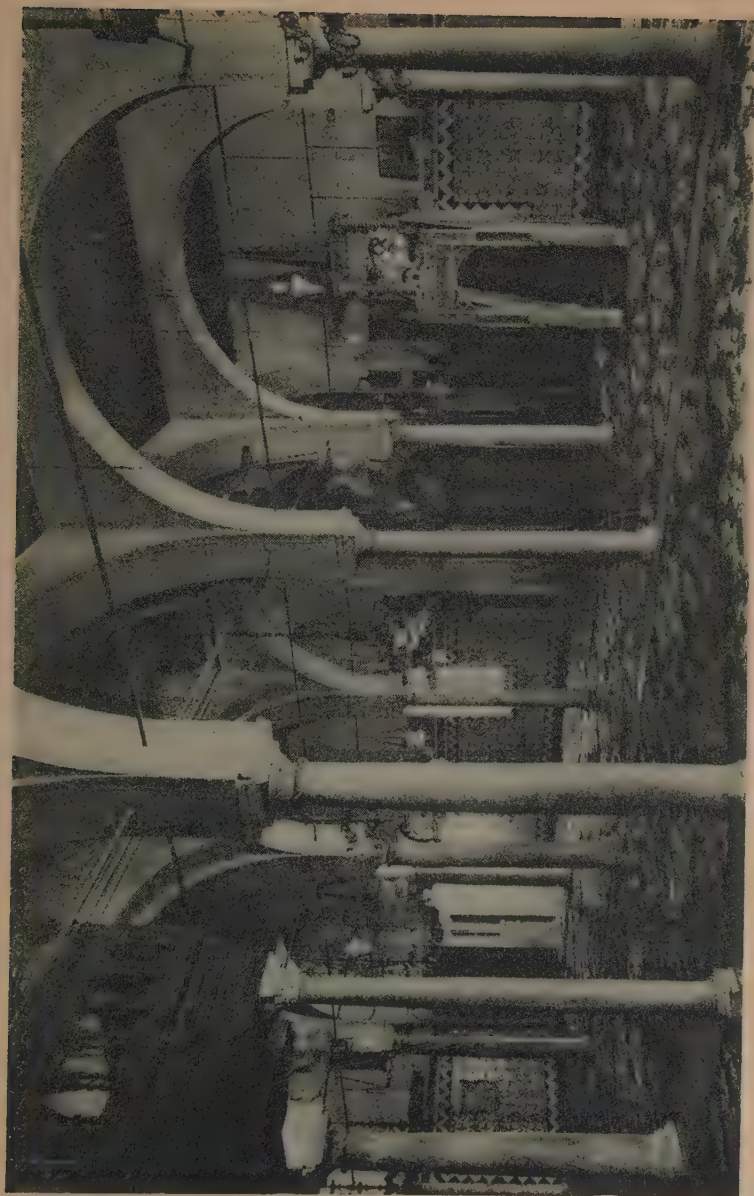
Many Roman relics were discovered here, among them a statue of a Roman matron, a family shrine of one of the most powerful Roman gens and a bas-relief representing Hercules' fight with the lion. In the grounds of the bathing-establishment, which is almost hidden in a thick grove of orange- and lemon-trees, one may admire a splendid specimen of pistachio-tree whose boughs cover an area of some five hundred square yards. The country

around Hammam Meskutin is famous for its abundant flora, which gives shelter to much game. It was in one of these districts that I met a huntsman returning with two wild boars as his bag. On one of the lime-rock slopes the reputedly oldest olive-tree in Algiers, supposed to have stood for eight hundred years, clings to the rock with its python-like roots and seems to stand as a sentinel near a spacious cave that contains a large lake.

In the neighbouring mountains of Jebel Taya I was struck with the beauty of some wonderful stalactite grottos that had old Roman inscriptions carved on their walls in memory of the local god, Bocaxus. There are many caves of various sizes in the neighbourhood, which frequently contain heaps of human and animal bones. A beggar, whining for alms outside one of these, volunteered the information that these bones were deposited here in very ancient days after some battle, when the victors threw into the caves the dead bodies of the vanquished, to which were afterwards added the bodies of prisoners sentenced to death by drowning in the hot springs of Meskutin. I do not know when this was supposed to have taken place, if ever it did occur ; but it is at least certain that the hot waters of Meskutin could be used successfully as a means of execution.

Further along, at Annuna and Guelma, the ancient Calama, Roman and Byzantine ruins, triumphal arches, forums, houses and temples and a number of statues, including a heroic figure of Jupiter, have been found, as well as the remains of Roman theatres and baths.

Following the valley of the Seybuse River we came closer and closer to the sea. Running along between the beautiful farms of colonists, we seemed to have the breeze of the sea already upon us. There were rich vineyards, pastures with their herds of a superior breed of local cattle, plantations of tobacco, orchards, olive-groves and suddenly—the azure surface of the sea with the smoke of steamers lingering over it, the white sails of fishermen's boats dotted



23. INTERIOR OF THE MOSQUE. SIDI EL KETTANI



24. A NATIVE VILLAGE ON THE COAST



here and there, and on the right the spacious harbour of Bona.

As it began to pour torrents while we were looking about this far from distinctive little French port, I gave up any idea of touring the surrounding country and proceeded direct to the museum in Hippo, or Hippo Regius, which was a fairly large city in Roman days where St. Augustine, the Bishop of Hippo, passed his saintly life and where he died in the early fifth century, when the city was besieged by the Vandals. It was after the death of the famous bishop that the city was captured, pillaged and burned. Recently the remnants of some cyclopean Phœnician walls were found here, together with an old Roman bridge, some mosaics, columns, monuments, household utensils and bronze statuettes.

Anxious to round out my journey in Tunisia and to return thence to the Great Kabylia in Algeria, where I was invited to take part in a hunting-party organized by the Polish Consul, Monsieur Rosée, and by the Governor of this district, Monsieur Courtin, I ignored the driving rain and ordered the chauffeur to start for the Tunisian frontier.

The road ran along the shore of the Mediterranean, losing this only when it followed a valley into the surrounding mountains. Later, as we climbed a low mountain-chain, we came into sight of the settlement of La Calle, which appeared to be hung on the rocky shore above black, sharp reefs that emerged from the sea.

In ancient days La Calle was known as Tunisa, and was destroyed and reconstructed on several occasions during the many political upheavals that swept over Africa. It has remained a port to these days, but only for the use of smaller boats, and has won for itself the reputation of being the healthiest place on the African seaboard because of its very mild climate and because of the oak-forests which surround it. By the time I arrived the downpour



had ceased, so that I was able to go on a tour of the little town while waiting for my dinner.

On the shore I made the acquaintance of some fishermen, who told me of their still very primitive methods of catching fish and showed me their warehouse, where I inspected the catch of the preceding night. In it I noticed a specimen of the rather rare ribbon-fish, which was about five feet long, of a silvery white colour and with black stripes along the sides. It is called the "pearl necklace" by fisherwomen, for its sheen and colour remind one of a silver necklace studded with pearls and enamel.

Common oysters are also caught in Algerian waters. I was told by the fishermen that, if it were possible to protect oysters at the time when their shells are not yet completely formed, they would become the cheapest and most nutritious of human foods. In the natural conditions of sea-life millions of these tiny molluscs perish, devoured by crabs, fishes, snails and worms.

Sardines and tunnies are the most sought-after fish on the African shore of the Mediterranean. The ancient Romans and Phœnicians already knew the tunny. It is a strange fish, for in its fresh or salted state it is very tasty and wholesome, while the moment it is even slightly stale it becomes poisonous. Its bones then turn red and its flesh tastes almost exactly like pepper. Before being sold to the public this fish is usually examined by experts, especially during the periods of the simoon or the sirocco, when it spoils very rapidly.

While I was talking with the fishermen, who were mostly Italians, another boat arrived, from which I was shown a fish that is now rapidly dying out in these waters. It was the *Eledone moschata*, a representative of the *octopi*, which have been from earliest time enveloped in a halo of grim legends of men, and even whole boats, being seized and sucked under in their slimy embrace. This particular species of octopus is distinguished by a very strong odour of pigment,

which is, however, not unusual with the other kinds. I gathered from the fishermen that the octopus is sold in the local markets and used as human food.

Two other strange creatures came into the fishermen's nets on that day. The first of these were cuttlefish, which, in self-defence or in anger, emit a dark-brown fluid known in the trade as *sepia*. On their backs they also carry a limy shell, which is sold under the name of meerscham, or sepiolite. The second strange element in the catch were two large *calmars*, or squids, with bulging, surprise-filled eyes and long feelers for catching their prey.

The squid is greatly appreciated by Spanish and Italian gourmets. Once in a restaurant in Spain I picked at random from the menu a dish given as *Kalmars*, the taste of which reminded me of tripe. It was served with a black, inky sauce and impressed me as most unsuitable for official dinners, for there is nothing easier than to have one's face besmeared with ink while eating it. I strongly suspect that the Spanish cook, instead of a *calmar*, flung a vicious and hysterical *sepia* into his pan. Under the circumstances, the *sepia* had obviously every reason for its anger and hysteria.

Near and around the Algerian shores, also along the Tunisian seaboard, a very profitable industry is being carried on by the natives in the propagation and gathering of coral. This is found on reefs and shoals, which are also the favourite resort of many varieties of fish and crabs, which consequently also attract large fleets of fishing-boats.

After my walk about the town I started back toward the car, but on my way stopped for dinner at a little restaurant, where I found only three others in the room, two of whom were a young couple who were flirting quite openly, without paying the slightest attention to their surroundings, and the third an elderly gentleman in gold-rimmed eyeglasses at a neighbouring table. When I looked around at the sound of an indiscreet term of endear-

ment which reached me from the dark corner, the elderly gentleman smiled benignantly and, after the assurance that he was not intruding, moved his chair to my table.

"Every time I am in La Calle I find such amorous couples. Apparently the sea, the air and the forest inspire these ladies and gentlemen to romance; but their little flirtations do not always end happily."

"In this case," I rejoined, as I motioned toward the dark corner, "no danger seems to threaten the lovers."

"Who knows? If you will allow me, I shall tell you of something which I witnessed myself some years ago in this very place."

He emptied his glass and, lighting a cigar, continued:

"I was on my way from Tunis to Constantine. My chauffeur, a native, drove the car like a madman, so that more than once I had to curb his passion for speed by pointing out to him the dangers of taking corners at forty miles an hour. The results of such driving were not entirely pleasant, for it was with difficulty that we finally managed to get into La Calle, where the car, after having been so badly shaken about, stopped dead and would not move another inch.

"'Monsieur!' mumbled my now embarrassed chauffeur, 'I am very sorry, but the car will have to be towed to the nearest garage, and we shall not be able to continue our journey until to-morrow.'

"Resigned to my fate, I took a room in a small hotel, then the only one in this little seaside town, and, after having washed and changed, went down into the restaurant. Very few people were there. A minor official was filling himself with bread and salad and a greenish-yellow wine, which must have had at least the taste of vinegar, for after each glass the man's face plainly bore evidence of martyrdom and suffering.

"In the corner, close by my table, a young couple were apparently engrossed in their luncheon. I should hardly

have noticed them were it not for the knowing and sympathetic smiles of the barmaid and the waiter and the unusual attention which was paid to their orders by the staff. The girl was young, perhaps twenty, and very smartly dressed. She *was* pretty! Her raven-black hair showed beneath a coral-coloured hat with a large gold buckle and a black, smooth feather. Brown eyes, fresh lips and a soft complexion formed a most harmonious and exquisite picture. On her finger I noticed a wedding-ring. Her swain was a tall, well-built fellow, with fair hair, blue eyes and pale, inspired features.

"That these two were in love would have been obvious even to my car, for love flamed in their eyes and chanted its triumphant song in their voices, dimmed and soft as if afraid to scare away the little god of mystery and radiant happiness. They talked about Dante. This greatly surprised me, for here in the African colonies people talk only about the wine and olive harvests, about the wool and stock exchanges and about their health. In a pleasing voice the cavalier recited fragments of the genial poet and filled his glass with the golden *Kebir Impérial*.

"After luncheon I was able to visit the whole town in less than half an hour and, taking a road that wound through the oak-forest, I walked along the sea. It was a beautiful day. I stretched out on the white sand and watched the amusing crabs, as they crept about fighting bitterly for every shell, every morsel of decaying fish or the bits of plants that had been washed up by the sea.

"Suddenly I heard voices quite close to me, and, turning in the direction of the sound, perceived my new friends. Apparently not having noticed me, they had sat down on a near-by rock, where the youth was continuing the conquest which he had begun at the table.

" 'My book of poetry has met with tremendous success in Paris. The papers are already speaking of me, and the publishers are asking for a new volume. I am writing



one now, *Sonnets of the Sea*, which will surely be a powerful work. . . . When I have conquered the world, I shall come for you. . . . Under your feet I shall scatter flowers throughout your life. . . . I shall guard you from everything that is monotonous, grey and indifferent."

" ' And my husband ? ' interrupted the woman.

" ' Your husband ? . . . Divorce . . . or perhaps elopement ! ' "

" She sighed, while he pondered deeply ; and I had the impression that there was something lacking in the poet's answer. I did not want to listen any longer, so I rose and walked away noiselessly.

" In the evening I saw my friends again in the cosy lounge, where they sat snuggled together on the sofa sharing an illustrated paper. Suddenly the silence was interrupted by the strident honk of a motor, whose flaming headlights flared for a second through the room. A moment after the car had stopped outside the hotel, a man of enormous height and breadth, with a long travelling-coat covering his giant form and a leather cap drawn closely down over his forehead, rushed into the room.

" ' Well, of course ! ' the newcomer roared in a stentorian voice. ' What else could one expect ? Wherever she goes, this thing follows her. Hands off other men's wives, you whimpering pup ! ' "

" Having delivered himself of this oration, the irate giant dragged the unfortunate poet into the centre of the room and there, with a well-aimed blow of his fist, sent him to the floor, kicking the huddled form as it started moving out of reach. Then, turning to the trembling woman, in sarcastic chivalry he offered her his arm with these words :

" ' Madame ! Your new car has been delivered this afternoon. It is a beauty ! Come along, my little darling, come ! ' "

" Humbly she took the proffered arm and moved toward the door.



“ ‘ Will she look back ? ’ I wondered. But she left the room without turning her head. . . .

“ ‘ It is an ill sign,’ I thought, and turned back to the poet. The author of *Sonnets of the Sea* was still sitting on the floor, very apparently the worse for the encounter, sobbing bitterly and lamenting.

“ ‘ Get up ! ’ I called to him. ‘ No real man would weep at such a time.’

“ ‘ What can I do ? ’ he stuttered between his sobs. ‘ He is so strong and rich, and she loves only me, no one but me ! ’

“ ‘ Are you quite certain ? ’

“ ‘ Oh yes.’

“ ‘ Then you must fight ! ’ I advised him genially.

“ ‘ But he is so strong and rich ! ’ repeated the unhappy poet, with grief and despair in his voice.

“ ‘ But, my dear sir ! didn’t you say that after your second book is published you would conquer the world ? Surely it is easier to conquer one man than the whole wide world ! ’

“ Rising to his feet, he threw himself despondently on the sofa and wept like a child. At last he said through a flood of tears :

“ ‘ She will die in the monotony of that suburban life, among those awful men who talk of nothing but profits and new methods of cattle-breeding.’

“ ‘ But what of those who talk of new cars, frocks and diamonds, and of holidays in Paris or in Nice ? ’

“ He did not answer, but sat in silence for some time and then left the library, wretched and squashed like a worm.

“ The following morning, as I was seated beside my Arab chauffeur on my way to Constantine, I asked him :

“ ‘ Is wealth a good thing, Ali ben Mohammed ? ’

“ ‘ Yes, Sidi, for it can conquer anything,’ he replied.

“ ‘ And strength of fists ? Is it also good ? ’

“ ‘It is, for it can defend anything,’ he answered, as if reading verses from the Koran.

“ ‘*Bien.* And love?’ ”

“ ‘Love, too, is a good thing, for it has the power both to conquer and to defend. It is gold and strength combined.’ ”

“ My ruminations for a while followed the lines of these Oriental formulæ, and something in my brain whispered to me about an absolute justice, independent of any laws and social restrictions ; the whisper, however, died suddenly, just like a violin note when a string is broken, as I remembered :

“ ‘But she did not look back.’ ”

“ That was the snapping of the string.”

After dinner, having bid farewell to my new friend and having registered in the depths of my heart the strong hope that the young couple in the corner should not have to experience the effect of Dante’s poetry blended with “ the strength of fists ” and the temptation of a new car, I left the restaurant and proceeded on my way.

We were soon speeding across a picturesque countryside through low mountains covered with cork- and oak-forests toward the Tunisian frontier, where the endorsement on my documents by Senator Steeg, then Governor-General of Algeria, reduced formalities to a minimum. We stopped for about an hour in Tabarca, a small port situated in a most beautiful spot and already known in the remote days of antiquity. The ruins of her port, built centuries ago, can still be seen just outside the present town ; also the remains of old Turkish fortifications and of a castle which was erected, it seems, in the sixteenth century by the Genoese.

As we continued eastward, I noticed some fern-brakes, so very unusual in North Africa ; but these disappeared as soon as we drove into the long stretches of sand piled up in dunes of considerable height.

Beyond the Abiod mountain-chain we cross the Béja River and sped unceremoniously through the city of the same name, with its immense surrounding moors covered with beautiful purple heather. Here the dusk began to envelop us, so that we had to continue our journey under the disguising veil of night. It was ten o'clock when I noticed rows of small houses amid gardens and orchards, which soon formed themselves into regular streets. The suburb then melted into the city, with formidable buildings, brilliantly illuminated cafés and restaurants, glittering signs outside theatres and cinemas, clattering tram-cars and busy European crowds.

We were in Tunis, a large French city with two hundred thousand inhabitants, half of whom are French, Italian, Spanish, Maltese and Jews and the other half Arabs and Berbers.

## CHAPTER VIII

### THE HERITAGE OF CARTHAGINIAN RULERS

WHEN the Phœnicians landed on the African coast and erected Carthage they realized that a secure and convenient shelter for their ships would also be necessary. In consequence, they built the city of Thunes along the shore of a gulf which cuts deeply into the mainland. The watch-towers and fortifications erected at the entrance of this harbour could have stopped the strongest fleet of those days, had it attempted to enter and attack Carthage.

Being a race of traders, the Carthaginians endeavoured to penetrate into the interior of the continent, there to seek new merchandise and new markets. However, the Numidian nomads dwelling here resisted the foreign invaders so long and so successfully that the Phœnicians were for centuries unable to establish themselves firmly in the African Hinterland. Supported by their powerful fleet, they could only dominate the coast, where they built their ports, fortresses and warehouses. In this wise they founded the cities of Susa, Tunis, Bizerta and others to the west until they came even out on the Atlantic Ocean; and it was through these cities and their attractions that the Carthaginians developed a more subtle means of capturing the feelings of the inhabitants, even though they may not have gained power over the country itself.

These centres, teeming with life and gaiety, established a powerful sway over the Numidians. Great riches, mysterious cults, the political dexterity of the Carthaginians and the beauty and cunning of their women—all these in time won over and attached to the intruders numerous nomadic tribes, although they realized that their blood and wealth

were being drained by subtle Carthage. From the Numidian camps and villages she absorbed everything that was produced by their inhabitants. Yet in times of war these nomads often formed large armies, led by their bribed or subdued kings and princes, that fought under the banner of Carthage. These centres of Phœnician influence extended along the coast like gluttonous spiders, barring to other peoples all entry to the land, which was being exhausted by the exploitation of Carthaginian merchants and officials. Such was Tunis.

With the fall of Carthage this city also naturally yielded to the impact of victorious Rome, and to the Phœnicians nothing remained. A few statuettes of the goddess Tanit, some mosaics, Phœnician coins and jewels, scattered throughout the museums of the world, seem to be all that has remained of the once mighty city of Carthage! Rome and her powerful civilization smashed and shattered into atoms the work of centuries. The Phœnician period seems like an echo of prehistoric days, while the stones and columns of Roman buildings and the still existing temples appeal to the thought and imagination in a clear and unequivocal voice, almost the voice of yesterday. Nowhere in Tunis can any Phœnician ruins be seen. So completely have they disappeared from the surface of the earth that it seems as though that period of Carthage must have existed only in the poets' imagination.

On the other hand, splendid monuments of Rome extend as far as Zaghuan, nearly forty miles to the south of Tunis, among which is the seemingly interminable aqueduct that was of great assistance to the French engineers in the construction of the modern system of municipal waterworks.

The general impression of the native quarter of Tunis suggests to one a comparison with old Turkish cities, such as Trebizond, or other places in Asia Minor. A similar impression is created by Bizerta, and only Susa and Kairwan preserve their ancient Berber character.



Neither the Romans, the Turks, the Asiatic Arabs nor the French have apparently been able to cause any essential change in the psychology of the inhabitants of Tunisia. They may have become accustomed to certain hitherto unknown objects and institutions or they may even have changed the external forms of life outside their own homes ; but the soul of the Berber has remained as irreconcilable as it was in the days of Hamilcar or Hasdrubal, who alone planted in him their psychology, the main principles of their religious cult, their superstitions and their beliefs. These Phœnician traditions were later blended with the teachings of the Prophet, which were brought here by the Arabs and firmly established by the might of their swords.

I visited the harbour first. From Tunis to Goletta there extends the so-called " little sea," El-Bahira, a shallow gulf across which a channel has been dredged for the larger steamers. It abounds in fish. In the early hours of the morning I saw along the shore of the gulf several cormorants fishing eagerly and successfully, while further along there stood a pair of flamingos, looking like two pink flowers blossoming over the mud.

On the other side of Tunis there is still another large body of water, Lake Sejumi. It was formerly a gulf, but is at present entirely separated from the sea and is filled with water at only certain times of the year, becoming almost dry in summer under the influence of the sun. When I visited it, the basin was covered with a layer of salt, over which hovered swarms of water-birds, mostly seagulls of various kinds, with a black Egyptian stork standing motionless near the edge as though on watch.

In the city I visited the mosque of Jama ez-Zituna, built in the eighth century but destroyed and reconstructed many times since then. The influence of Turkish art is manifest everywhere. Byzantine columns and a tall, imposing minaret leave no doubt as to the nationality of the architects. According to a legend, the mosque was erected

here on the site of an early Christian church. Attached to it are also several *medersas*. I visited one of them and, remembering my experience in Fez, made the acquaintance of a *thaleb*, who appeared to me more clever and better in his use of French than any of the others. With him I toured Tunis, and with his aid I was able to talk with the natives and to make notes in cafés, inns and native taverns.

I spent the most interesting part of my visit to Tunis among the local Mussulmans, from whom I learned about the mode of life of the natives, usually hidden and inaccessible to Europeans. These Mussulmans of Tunisia are divided into various religious organizations headed by sheiks, whose emissaries circulate throughout the country recruiting *khuan*s, brothers, and *khanats*, sisters, for their respective sects. All these organizations have considerable capital at their disposal, which is derived from the subscriptions of their members, and maintain their own temples and charitable institutions. Every sect is under the absolute power of its sheik. During periods of political unrest and insurrection these religious brotherhoods play important parts and support their own leaders and their ambitions. As between themselves, they combine into a powerful force. Strictly speaking, all these organizations form sects of Islam which appeared in its earlier days, when various prophets and theologians advocated different interpretations of certain parts of the Koran.

Until the middle of the nineteenth century the development of sectarianism and the consequent decay of Islam were almost continuous. The white races knew how to take advantage of this for their own ends. However, one or the other of these sects at times produced a Mahdi, a holy leader who could reconcile the majority, if not all, of the existing brotherhoods into a protesting mass that stirred up considerable anxiety and not infrequently fear among the Europeans.

Most of these religious sects in Tunis, such as the Senussi, Aïssawa, Tijania and Rahmania, also count women among their members. It is an interesting illustration of the zeal of converts to know that the Rahmania sisterhood was formed by a Frenchwoman who had been won over to Islam and who took part in all the insurrections against the French. In addition there is the Chadelya sect, which was established by a saint who never slept and who constantly sipped strong, black coffee, for which reason the Mussulman women of Tunis refer to coffee as *chadelya*; the Derkawa brotherhood, founded in 1826, hostile to Europeans and uniting all beggars and vagabonds into a powerful organization advocating anarchy; and the Kadria, whose credo is formed by the phrase "There is no God above Allah," repeated one hundred and sixty-five times after each one of the five compulsory daily prayers.

In *The Fire of Desert Folk* I have mentioned the Aïssawa sect. It is the most peaceful of all the North African religious organizations, and its sheiks willingly admit Europeans to their meetings, although they are in principle hostile to our civilization. My *thaleb* took me to a meeting of the Aïssawa. When we arrived the sheik had already recited the prescribed verses from the Koran, and the congregation, leaning against the walls, were repeating one hundred times the phrase: "*La Illah Illa Allah u Mahommed Rassul Allah, Allah Akbar.*"

With these prayers concluded, an orchestra began to play, whereupon the sheik performed some monotonous movements with his hands, head and feet to the ever louder and faster music, the congregation repeating the movements of their leader. After a time some of them began to sway and finally fell to the floor, but were set on their feet again and forced to commence the ceremony anew. It was not long, however, before at least half of them were down in a faint or in a trance-like sleep, while the others, foaming at their mouths, began to shout and to reel about the place.

To these bits of glass, scorpions, nails and small snakes were handed by the sheik and were immediately swallowed by the sectarians. Some of them inflicted wounds on themselves, pierced their cheeks and necks with pins or flung themselves on cactus-thorns. This lasted for a considerable time in the stench of the narrow room, filled with the odour of human sweat and with the smoke of burning incense. Later the sheik began to read again verses from the Koran, whereupon the music stopped and everyone appeared quiet and conscious again. Kissing the hands of the sheik or the skirts of his burnous, the Faithful left this house, in which, as I only discovered later, there was an epidemic disease. According to the Aïssawa sect the evil spirits or djinns of disease must be exorcised by prayer and mortification of the flesh, and this was the ceremony to which I had been unwittingly led by my *thaleb*. The whole population of Tunis belongs to one or the other of these religious sects ; for, according to Monsieur Bouquero de Voligny in his *A Tunis—Derrière les Murs*, they believe that “ he who has no sheik has the devil as his sheik.”

In the native quarter I noticed one characteristic variation in the dress of the women, who here invariably wear black veils, while their burnouses are white or coloured, which gives them the appearance of having on carnival masks, as they steal along the winding passages or through the semi-darkness of the *suks*. The *thaleb* who accompanied me told me that many of the native women possess the secret of ancient magic, which they perform according to the oldest traditions.

In one of the *suks* we discovered a little basketware shop belonging to an old Berber who was supposed to be the best living authority on talismans and charms. I invited him to go with us to a neighbouring café and, having bought a talisman in the form of an old Roman coin on which various magic signs were scratched, I began to question him regarding the details of his art. I progressed far in his favour when



he discovered that I was conversant with the magic practices of the Buddhist Lamas.

The wizened Berber gave me several "infallible" magic prescriptions. It is a matter of peculiar interest that similar recipes can be found in Pliny's *Natural History*.

Thus, in order to sow discord between husband and wife, it is sufficient to place between them in their sleep some gall of a green lizard. I realized that the bitterness and colour of gall were the logical basis for this recipe.

If you want to speed up the growth of your beard or moustache, just squash a butterfly on your face !

A maiden sprinkled with the water wherein a dead body was bathed will never marry without the aid of magic. In order to counteract the evil spell, a woman thus afflicted should at sunrise plunge into seven waves, drinking a little of each, and afterwards walk to a forest carrying on her head a basket containing soil from a graveyard. On leaving the forest she must burn one of the magic substances, sulphur, wool, horns or hair, remaining absolutely silent throughout the operation. In places far removed from the sea, wells into which the sun has never shone may be substituted for the waves.

The old sorcerer told me also that a hawk's heart, wrapped in a strip of hyena's hide on which the outlines of the moon and a dog biting its tail are traced, forms a talisman which will keep dogs from barking at the possessor of it. At my request he showed me his leather bag containing various magic substances.

"Here are the eyes of a crab, of a cat and of a bat, powerful magic specifics," he explained. "If you mix them with salt or antimony and take a dose of the mixture before dawn, you are able to see ghosts and to ask them questions. This is a mixture of the hearts of a jackal and an owl, dried, powdered, and sewn into a little bag made of lion's hide. A man carrying this *nufra* (amulet) need not fear either bad men, evil spirits or wild beasts. If you carry





25. A FISHERMAN'S HUT ON THE MEDITERRANEAN



26. THE RULING BEY OF TUNIS, SIDI MOHAMET EL HADJ

a *nufra* made from the powdered gall of a black hen, a black cat, a swallow and a black ox, mixed with henna or with antimony, your eyes will see at night as plainly as they see in the daytime. If a man wishes to be invisible and inaudible to living beings, he must, after long prayer and a *riada*, place in the folds of his turban a little bag made of jackal's skin containing a powder compounded from the brains of a monkey, a hawk, a black cock, a hoopoe and a bat and moistened in water with aloes and vanilla. A dose of powder made from the dried eyes of a hedgehog, an owl and a hoopoe mixed with *hedta*,<sup>1</sup> will enable any one to see water flowing deep under the surface of the earth."

With the old sorcerer I visited the *suk* of the perfumers, where these magicians of Tunis purchase the perfumes indispensable to their trade, such as black and white benzoin, elemi mastic, imported from the Sudan, aloes, coriander, Libyan pitch and myrrh.

According to E. Doutté the most popular text-book among the African sorcerers is that of one Ibn el-Hadj, which gives a table of twelve magic perfumes that compel the spirits to serve those who offer these fragrant sacrifices. In this pharmacopœia we find, among various obscure substances, Indian nard, rose, camphor and saffron. The native perfumers will also supply you with most of the magic powders prepared from the various organs of animals and birds, as well as the mysterious Persian mandragora and the "*Et tebkhira el-khanza*," hideously smelling substances which are supposed to frighten away evil spirits.

After we parted from our purveyor of magic, the *thaleb* took me to the end of the Arab quarter and pointed out a house wherein an Arifet dwelt. She was a Sudanese witch, one of the four described by M. Bouquero de Voligny, who adds that among their clients are many Europeans. The author states that not infrequently these witches fall into

<sup>1</sup> A mixture of copper with antimony, powdered gallnuts and oil, used by women for painting their hair, eyebrows and lashes.

a state of ecstasy through blowing trumpets, beating drums and tambourines and inhaling the intoxicating fragrance of various magic perfumes. Each autumn they go on a pilgrimage to marshy places where frogs and tortoises live. The Arifet feeds these denizens of the marsh with eggs painted red, cakes and specially prepared beans. If the animal takes food from the witch's hand, it is a sure sign that she is regarded as most beloved by the evil spirits. My *thaleb* informed me that these witches practise almost exclusively among women, whom they constantly fleece for special love amulets prepared from the dried brain of a hyena, which is supposed to provoke love and passion. For this reason native women refer to passionate love as *deba*, or "hyena." The witches can also protect children from the evil eye and husbands from the infidelity of their wives. The safeguard against the first is the tying of a knot in the hair of the mother or in the beard of the father, while that against the second is a knot on a whip or on a bridle.

Tunisian witches are also supposed to be experts in the magic powers of *khatems*, or precious stones. Like the mediæval alchemists, they hold that a diamond cures all diseases, a topaz, jaundice, and a bloodstone, toothache and hemorrhage, as well as preventing sudden death; that a cat's-eye makes a warrior invisible in battle; that a turquoise cures eye-diseases and ensures an abundance of milk in nursing-mothers; that a ruby strengthens the heart and guards one from cholera and plague; and that jade brings immunity from venomous snakes and scorpions and cures epilepsy at the same time. While preparing the talisman, the witches appeal to a figure representing The Star of Solomon.

A large revenue is derived by the Sudanese sorceresses from the sale of shirts and turbans covered with magic signs and serving as talismans. It is an interesting fact that on their talismans they frequently write unintelligible words, often of Phœnician origin, such as *malaka*, to reign,



or *barakka*, to bless ; but the most powerful talisman of all is the *khankatiriya*, commonly known as the *knickiatria*. This talisman has been referred to by a number of European scientists, and E. Doutté gives the prescription for it from some old Arab book.

This *khankatiriya* is a grim amulet having all the characteristics of the blood-sacrifices so current in the Phœnician cults. Here is the recipe : an absolutely black animal, without even the slightest spot of white, should be kept in the client's house and fed sumptuously for three days, while the client himself must observe an absolute fast. After three days he must repeat twenty-one times a very complicated and quite unintelligible phrase, and later, facing the east, must cut the victim's throat with one edge of his knife and its belly with the other, at the same time crying out the word "*khankatiriya*." The slain animal must then be placed in a vessel with thirteen swallows, after which the vessel's mouth should be sealed with clay and the receptacle placed over a fire. When the contents have been charred, the vessel should be opened with great care ; for, if the smoke gets into one's eyes, it produces instant blindness. After the contents have been cooled they must be ground to powder, while the word "*khankatiriya*" is being repeated. This powder can then be used for all talismans and amulets and, in accordance with the character of the adjuration employed, possesses the power of summoning up good or evil spirits.

I heard still more of the beliefs and superstitions of the Tunisian Berbers from my *thaleb*, among them some that are even current in Europe at the present time. In common with sportsmen of nearly every European country, the Berbers believe that misfortune awaits them if they meet an old woman on their way to the chase. When occupying a new house, they place vessels of food in all the rooms as a sacrifice to the spirits of the place.

With the *thaleb* I afterwards made an excursion to Sidi



Fathalla, a small village where a famous Marabout lived in days gone by and prayed to Allah from the rock which stood near his house. This rock is at present visited as a shrine every Friday by pilgrimages of women praying for fertility or of girls who intend to marry but fear the greatest calamity of a Mussulman household—childlessness. The sloping rock is as polished and slippery as marble, which is explained by the fact that the praying women must, according to tradition, roll down the rock three times. As I looked upon this polished rock, connected with such a primitive superstition, I recalled the old temples of Asia where women, in their prayers for offspring, had but to touch certain columns with their fingers. Since this custom has come down from times immemorial, the women's fingers have worn incredibly deep grooves in the columns. I also recollected the worship of the black stone, which, originating in the depths of Asia, appeared on the shores of the Mediterranean and even penetrated to Rome. All these are variations of the phallic cult appearing in diverse forms in different countries. The ecstasy of some of the women visiting Sidi Fathalla proves this theory beyond any doubt.

Though the hakims, or quack doctors, are persecuted here in Tunisia just as they are in Morocco, cases where they are called in for certain diseases are still not unusual. In most treatments the "cure" is effected by a talisman with a prayer inside it, which is worn on the afflicted part of the body. Sometimes a slip of paper with a prayer written upon it is boiled in water, and a dose of this "extract of prayer" is supposed to cure the patient.

Ophthalmic diseases, so prevalent in the East, are treated by the hakims with exhortations, magic signs representing the names of spirits, or a strip of red linen which is worn over the patient's eyes. It may be noted that the inhabitants of Tunis, already acquainted with the efficacy and power of European medicine, willingly consult the French doctors, but at the same time follow the advice of

their own hakims and witches. Under such circumstances their magic remedies are usually successful.

From my conversations with the *thaleb* I concluded that the magic cult of *yoksha*, based on the occult power of the ninety-nine names of Allah, which is tolerated by Islam and very popular in Morocco, is not found in Tunisia. Black magic is predominant here, and its best exponents are the Sudanese Arifets.

During my visit to the port of Goletta I made the acquaintance of a fisherman who carried on his chest a talisman that was supposed to give the power of discovering treasures both on land and at sea. It was the so-called "*terbi*." While I was inspecting the little leather bag with the magic signs burned upon it, the fisherman told me that he had come to Goletta from Algiers some twenty years ago, that he had eaten the head of a dorada on the day of his arrival, and that since then he had continuously remained in the country. There is a proverb which runs: "He who eats the head of a dorada caught in Tunisian water will never leave the country."

This black cloud of superstition and magic hangs over every aspect of the life of these Tunisian natives. It is evidently tolerated and connived at in Tunis, under the very eyes of a civilized bey and of the French administration; but in the south, around Kairwan and Susa, it reigns supreme in the encampments of the southern tribes.

The customs of life among the Tunisians are almost identical with those of other Berber tribes in Algeria and Morocco. There are certain minor differences in wedding and funeral ceremonies, but these are hardly worth mentioning. One circumstance is, however, striking. The Tunisian woman is undoubtedly more independent than her sisters in other parts of North Africa and often participates in social and political activities. There are not infrequent cases of women taking part in municipal elections or teaching in schools. In addition, their participation in religious

movements is quite common—a phenomenon which cannot be observed in Morocco or Algeria, where the woman lives exclusively for her home, her husband and her children. It is not unusual to hear of women sheiks and Marabouts, whereas women street-singers or conductors of bands and choirs are very common in the capital and in other large cities.

I could not help observing the fact that the inhabitants of Tunis take great interest in political events. During my visits to various open-air meetings with a Spanish guide who was well versed in the native language, I had it very definitely impressed upon me that the Tunisians are watching with keen interest the developments in Egypt, Turkey and northern Morocco. They discuss these matters openly and talk with admiration of Abd el-Krim and the successes of the Riffians, expressing in no uncertain language their hostility and contempt for all Europeans and voicing their hope in the advent of a new Mahdi, who will raise the green standard of the Prophet and expel all *berrania* from countries where the Faithful praise the name of Allah and of his Prophet.

Surprised at this hostility to foreigners, I decided to investigate the matter more closely. In the process of doing so I had a long conversation on this subject with a man in intimate touch with the intricacies of the political situation of the country, whose name I am unfortunately not at liberty to divulge.

“We have here in Tunisia a cool-headed and conservative element, which is regrettably weaker and weaker every year. It is made up of old and wealthy men, who not only refrain from any hostility toward Europeans, but, on the contrary, strive for as close a rapprochement as the teaching of the Prophet will permit. Besides, they thoroughly realize the material value of that principle of Islam which advocates temporary submission to power. A very different element, however, is formed by the young Tunisians, who are in close

relations with the young Algerians and the young Turks. What a strange thing! By an irony of fate these young Tunisians are usually intelligent men and members of liberal professions—in a word, products of European civilization. Their training has opened to them new horizons and implanted in them the certainty that they themselves will lead their nation to welfare, happiness and political independence. Like the young Turks, they aim at the re-establishment of a Mohammedan Empire and are being aided by the Egyptian separatists in their attempt to realize this. There is still another element, the most dangerous one, for it is entirely irresponsible and with tendencies that cannot be foreseen. This is the religious organization of the Senussi, which recruits its members from the rural and urban proletariat and the half-savage nomads."

"Could you possibly give me any particulars of this sect?"

"Certainly. The Senussi originated in Algiers at the end of the eighteenth century, and since then have gained the largest number of followers of any of the religious movements. They have three hundred temples dispersed throughout the Mussulman world in Morocco, Egypt, Turkey, Kurdistan, Arabia, Persia, Afghanistan, the valley of the Ganges and China. Even in Russia they have a considerable following. Their influence is unlimited, which, in view of their hostility to foreigners, makes them a very dangerous organization. The Senussi movement regards as its enemies not only Europeans but also those Mussulman rulers who maintain any political relations with Christians. Its followers are fanatical advocates of pan-Moslemism, very cunningly plot anti-European intrigues and secretly take part in all disturbances directed against the white races. At the same time they encourage the emigration of Mussulmans out of territories under the European rule to Turkish or Persian dominions, where they thus increase the numbers of men most easily recruited into the army.



The mysterious influence of the Constantinople Sultan and of the Senussi leaders, who have their headquarters in the Kufrah oasis, has been felt in all the mutinies and rebellions against France in her African colonies. With the aid of the Senussi the young Tunisians and the young Algerians endeavour to discredit the French authorities and to spread dissatisfaction throughout the native masses, inciting them to an all-Mussulman war for freedom. They also demand for Moslems a larger participation in the administrative and educational offices of the country."

"Under the conditions which you have just described, the country would be an ideal hunting-ground for the agents of Bolshevism, who thrive in political and social disturbances of any kind," I remarked.

"This new enemy is already among us," interrupted my friend. "We reckon with the possibilities of Bolshevism, but unfortunately we do not fight it openly. Moscow sends into Turkey hosts of her agitators, who usually are drawn from the Mussulman tribes inhabiting the Volga districts or Siberia. We have been informed that all these men have been thoroughly prepared for their work either in the various schools of political propaganda or in the Military Academy in Kazan. Experts in their task, they bring here Bolshevism and its ideology, which could only have been conceived in the mind of an Oriental nomad. The psychology of the Eastern nations, so inclined to mysticism and dissension, could alone have brought the European ideals of liberty, equality and fraternity and the rights of the individual and the citizen to the absurdity of Bolshevism. Communism is not unknown among African tribes, for it survives from the ancient patriarchal organizations, traces of which are found not only among the nomads but also among the Berber farmers and settlers."

"I am fully acquainted with Bolshevism and with its propagandist methods among non-European nations, especially in Asia," I interrupted. "These forerunners of



Communism come to unadvanced peoples with slogans which are not by any means Communistic, because they know well the psychology of the Moslem world, with its great respect for individual property and ownership as well as for family life and religious traditions. They come here advocating a war for liberty, a struggle with the white races, pointing out and emphasizing all the failures and shortcomings of European administration, which are interpreted as attempts against the freedom, faith and welfare of the coloured tribes and peoples."

"So much the worse for us!" exclaimed my friend. "That is why they find an eager audience among the Senussi and the young Tunisians."

During my excursions through Tunis my eyes, well trained in observing the activities of Bolshevik agents in foreign countries, have on many occasions identified these individuals appearing here and there in the same manner as they appeared in Fez, which I have described in *The Fire of Desert Folk*. Inspecting almost every corner of the city, I realized the extent of the work which has already been done here by the French administration. The northern section of Tunis represents in its entirety a European colony, where one sees everywhere the neat, white villas of planters and business men. In the surrounding regions mechanical tractors, gang-ploughs and all the most modern agricultural machines are used for the cultivation of the soil, while well-built railways serve the country from Tunis to the mountainous Hammada, to Susa and as far as the oasis of El-Udian, whence extend the so-called *shotts*, or salt lakes, which have gradually become separated from the sea. Then there is the railway running along the shore from Tunis via Sfax to Gabes, near which the Eastern Erg with its sands and rocks begins. In addition to these, well-maintained roads, bridges and an abundance of wells throughout the country, enabling the development of agriculture in districts where any vegetation was hitherto

thought to be impossible, help to prove beyond doubt that the French have here performed a great work of civilization.

Native villages in the north appear to be very poor and neglected, and give the impression of temporary shelters built of stone, cemented with clay and roofed with red tiles. This is explained by the fact that the major part of their inhabitants earn their living in cities and on plantations. The *kubbas* and *zaouias* with their white walls usually have domes but are devoid of the corner turrets, which makes their appearance different from that of similar buildings in Morocco and Algeria.

Standing close to the most modern European buildings, these shrines of Mussulman worship seem an anachronism. However, as the inhabitants of Tunisia, though they have already adopted the external and not always the best usages of the men from across the sea, still reverence these places, the French scrupulously respect and protect them. In Tunis and in other northern cities the proletarianizing of the local Berbers and Arabs is rapidly progressing, and this new social order is undoubtedly a factor favouring the development of the political intrigues which are plotted on Tunisian territory. It may be that from this native proletariat has sprung the Tunisian feminism so alien to the Mussulman woman. Thus far this movement is still hidden, as it were, behind the black veils of the native women, but it can already be felt in various features of the local life, especially in the propaganda of the young Tunisians and in religious sects.

Native Tunis is to a large extent modernized as regards its external appearance, the dress of its inhabitants and their psychology; but it would be unwise to read in this progress an assimilation with Europeans. History supplies some striking examples which are bound to dampen any undue enthusiasm in this respect. For example, the Phœnicians secured a large number of followers during their epoch, not only among the ruling houses and the aristocracy

but also in many of the tribes, establishing their civilization and planting their cult of Baal and Ashtoreth deep in the hearts of the population. The Romans in turn gave the country a great material civilization, safeguarded the welfare of the tribes, erected aqueducts, built roads and wells and established law and order. Yet at the first opportunity the natives revolted against the authority of Rome and destroyed the great work of the powerful Empire as well as that of its predecessor, Carthage, pillaging the cities and temples and for centuries robbing the ruins of beautiful Corinthian columns, of marble and of onyx, which they used in the construction of their own temples, palaces and commercial *suks*.

The Tunisian native of the present day, especially in the north, seeing the advantages of co-operation with the French, does not, for the time being, revolt against the established law, but there is no doubt that his soul is in no way different from that of his Numidian ancestor who burned and destroyed the Carthage of the Phœnicians and later the Carthage of the Romans. But as soon as one proceeds toward the south one finds the nomads near Susa and Kairwan living their own lives, ignoring the Europeans and treating them with complete indifference. However, under the influence of the young Tunisian politicians and of the Senussi intrigues, this indifference might easily be transformed into hostility, a common occurrence in the fanatically inclined Mussulman countries.

It must always be remembered that any change in the sentiments of the population of a country does not by any means depend exclusively upon events that are transpiring in that land.

A Mussulman is not a nationalist or a "patriot of the land"; he is only a member of a world-organization of Mohammedans, a patriot of the Moslem faith. Echoes of events which nurture and incite the hatred and fanaticism of fellow-Mussulmans dwelling somewhere on the distant

banks of the Nile, on the Ganges or in the valley of the Huangho may reverberate very forcibly in Tunisia, in the Sudan or in Morocco. Therein lies the greatest danger to Europeans ruling Mussulman nations and tribes, for the sentiments and actions of the worshippers of Allah are unpredictable.

In modern days the tending of particular tribes and peoples towards political independence must also be reckoned with. Mussulman mysticism had, until recently, diverted the thought of its followers from contemporary civilization ; but it is now obvious that in these days of complicated internal relations and the entirely revolutionized conditions of life, no nation or tribe can exist without civilization and remain heedless of the fact that without it it will either degenerate and gradually die out or become the object of exploitation by its more civilized neighbours.

The leaders of uncivilized peoples and tribes, poisoned by political agitators, do not seem to realize this necessity for progress ; while, on the other hand, Western or Christian diplomacy, everywhere applying the argument of the fist, has so far failed to discover a method for explaining to them the true nature of their policy and the danger threatening the backward man from the consequences of his ignorance.

This situation is particularly dangerous for Tunisia. The population of that country exceeds two millions, and in this Mussulman ocean the European colony, with its 155,000 inhabitants, is but a drop. The dangers to which European colonization is here exposed become obvious the moment one sets foot on the Tunisian shores and become even more patent when one considers the political differences which divide Europeans in these parts. It is sufficient to glance through the official statistics, which show that out of the 155,000 white inhabitants France has only 55,000 of her own subjects as compared with 90,000 Italians and a mixed balance of Spaniards, Maltese and Greeks, to realize the position.

For two reasons it is hoped, however, that this state of affairs will change in the nearest future. The Italians, absorbed in the colonization of the recently occupied Lybian territory, will not be able to send out emigrants to French Tunisia. On the other hand, the French Government is sparing no effort to encourage their own emigration to the colony.

The country itself has excellent economic prospects in its large areas of cultivated land, olive-groves, countless flocks of sheep and large strata of phosphates—that coefficient of fertility in Europe. Meanwhile, the predominant part of this natural wealth is unexploited, bringing no benefit either to the natives or to the exhausted markets of Europe.



CHAPTER IX  
IN THE CITY OF DIDO AND SALAMMBO

*"Speluncam Dido dux et Trojanus  
eandem Devenient."* VIRGIL: *Æneid*.

"So died the daughter of Hamilcar, for  
with her hand she touched the garments  
of the goddess Tanit."

G. FLAUBERT: *Salamambo*.

*CARTAGO delenda esse . . .*

This was the slogan of Roman policy toward Africa, which, like every Roman formula, had to be converted into reality.

Scipio performed the task of destroying the mighty Carthage, and when the immense and wealthy city, counting seven times a hundred thousand inhabitants, lay shattered in ruins, he said :

*"Sic factum est !"*

His task was accomplished with such thorough ruthlessness that Carthage disappeared almost entirely from the surface of the earth, so that to-day any traces of the existence of the African capital of the Phœnicians can be identified with only the greatest difficulty. It is not easy at present for us to visualize either the power and splendour of the city or even its boundaries, for it has all disappeared under the ruins of a new, Roman Carthage and under a later surface of stones and sand, into which are sunk the foundations of such modern buildings as the beautiful Catholic Cathedral erected by Cardinal Lavigerie, the private villas and the government offices.

To a traveller visiting this place where the two greatest powers of the Mediterranean, Rome and Carthage, vied with each other for supremacy, where sounded the glorious names of Dido, Æneas, Mago, Hamilcar Barcus, Hannibal, Masinissa, Scipio, Syphax and Salmambo, where stood the mysterious temples of Baal, Melkarth and Ashtoreth—Tanit, for ever demanding sacrifices of blood and of gold, it may readily seem that all this is but a legend begotten of the powerful imagination of the poet.

Such was the impression which Carthage created upon me, for nothing tangible was left that could bear witness to her existence. I should have felt disappointed were it not for my two most illustrious and gifted guides. One of them was he who was the glory of the Roman Parnassus, the divine bard, Virgil; the other, a talented scientist and poet, Gaston Boissier, who occupies an honoured place in that present-day pantheon of science, art and talent, the French Academy.

With these two richly endowed guides I wandered through this tragic city, which had excited my imagination even in those schooldays when I read the *Æneid*. Our Latin master, an old German, Herr Julius Schonfeldt, a great admirer of Virgil, spoke to us lads of fifteen summers about the ancient world of heroes, mariners and adventurers of all kinds. He told us of the Phœnicians, those "hyenas of the sea," who sailed through the Pillars of Hercules and northward far away to the misty shores of Britain or south to the mouth of the Senegal, everywhere establishing trading outposts and commercial centres.

With tears in his eyes the old professor recounted the tragedy of Phœnician Tyre, where the archpriest was assassinated during the struggle that raged between the clergy and the dynasty for supremacy and royal power; he expressed to us his indignation that King Pygmalion should have desecrated the temple of Ashtoreth by opening its gates to the plebeians who supported him, and that he

had yielded to the urban mob, to men of lowly birth, by promising them the highest offices in a city that was erected by a god ; in a reverent whisper he told us that the royal sister Dido, the wife of the assassinated archpriest of Ash-toreth, and her followers left her native land in ships laden with gold and works of art and established a new city on the shores of Africa which they called Kart-hadasht, afterward changed by the Romans to Carthage ; he recalled how Æneas, after his misfortunes, came to the new city and conquered Dido's heart by his tale of woe about his native Troy, until at last the queen, with anger in her voice, exclaimed :

*Heu ! quibus ille  
Jactatus fatis quæ belle exhausta canebat !*

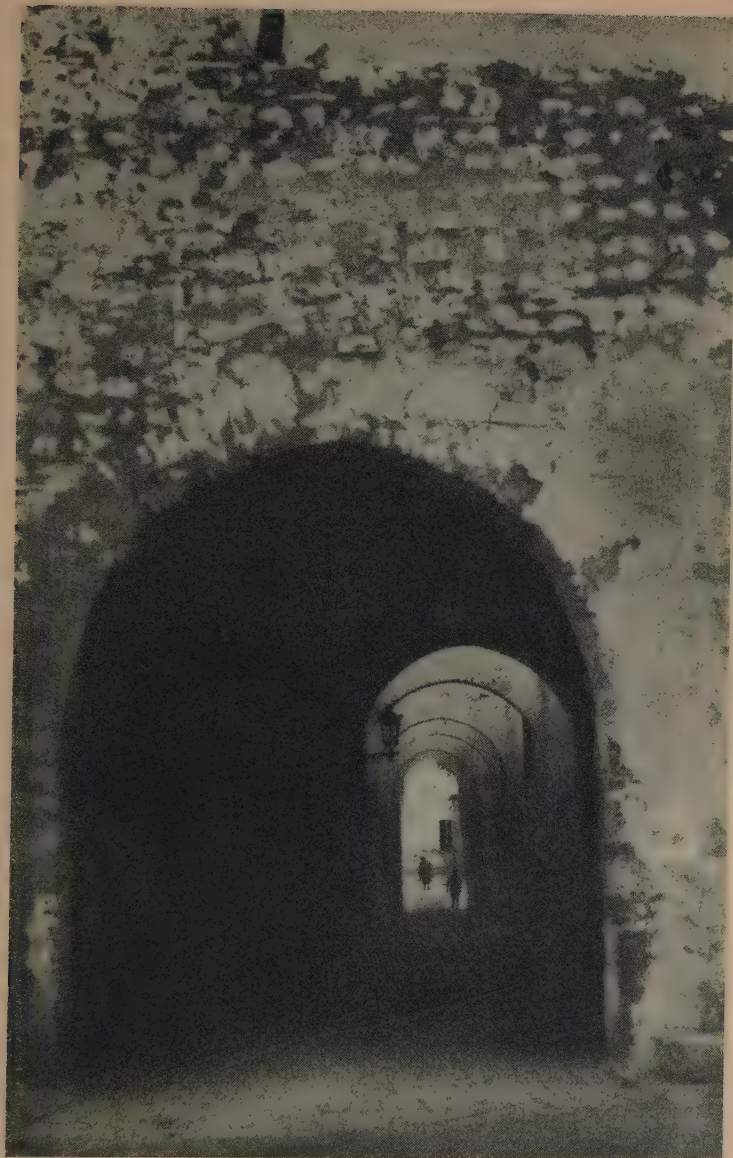
The old German praised her fidelity to her husband's memory, when, burning with love for Æneas, she struggled with her feelings, turned her eyes to the goddess and prayed :

" Let the earth be rent asunder to its depths, let the god cast me with a bolt of his thunder into the land of shadows, into the land of Erebus, rather than that I should forsake my honour or neglect my duty. He to whom I gave my first love took it with him ; let it remain always with him and be buried in his grave." (*Æneid*, IV, 24.)

Deeply moved, Schonfeldt read to us the chapter describing the death of the yearning Dido, deserted by Æneas, and with a trembling hand sketched on the board an imaginary plan of the city, following which he showed us drawings relating to the history of Carthage. Dear old professor ! Travelling from Tunis to Carthage, I longed to have you with me, knowing how happy you would be here with your love of romance.

Squeezing a volume of Virgil into my pocket with Monsieur Boissier's *L'Afrique Romaine*, I started on my journey.

On a hill about ten miles north-east of Tunis a magnificent cathedral dominates the country. Its site was the very



27. AN OLD STREET IN TUNIS





28. INTERIOR OF AN ARAB HOUSE



heart of ancient Carthage, the Byrsa quarter, and from it a beautiful view extends over the surrounding land and sea.

In the neighbourhood of this centre remains of Phœnician Carthage and of the later Roman city have been discovered. Between the layers that marked the levels of the two cities the scientist, Père Delattre, in several places unearthed ashes that bore testimony to the fire that the merciless soldier, Scipio, kindled in this capital of the enemies of Rome.

It is almost impossible to discover the ancient city of Queen Dido, for, apart from the destruction wrought by the Roman leader, the Arabs and Turks have spared no effort to complete the grim task. I doubt if there is a single old house in Tunis or Bizerta to the construction or appointment of which Carthage has not contributed something. How vast and how wealthy must have been this capital of Phœnician and Roman colonists to have supplied the vandals of all nations and of all races with centuries of endless plunder before the arrival of the French !

So Carthage is not a legend after all. You can really find here places described by Virgil, which causes you to listen with impatience to the sceptical criticisms of historians who try to convince you that Dido was but a mythological character, nothing more than an impersonation of the goddess Ashtoreth, brought here from her native land by some one, perhaps a caste of priests, who endeavoured to save her cult from obliterating conquest by other creeds.

I am glad to forget all this ; for when I think of these assertive, cold historic facts I see before me the sad, disappointed face of my guide, the divine Virgil, and I ask myself why it was that of all the Phœnician colonies Carthage alone had reached the climax of development ? What was the cause of her prosperity ? What drew to her the imperialism of the world, alien enterprise and the dreams of poets ?

I like to believe that it was nothing other than the tragic,

beautiful Dido, the mysterious cults of the veiled goddess Ashtoreth and the bloodthirsty, lusty Tanit, or the ecstatic orgies and refined taste of Oriental magnates who left behind them no arms or utensils, but precious jewels and magnificent sarcophagi, adorned with winged women that served as models for the Byzantine iconographs, columns and statues and for everything produced by the art of that period.

While I was wandering through Carthage my illustrious guides prompted me to go to the museum to see what had been unearthed on the site of the noble city.

Three rows of powerful walls had surrounded Carthage, the third nearly sixty feet high and thirty-three feet thick. In its vaults were stables for three hundred battle elephants and for the four thousand horses which were the mounts of the unsurpassed Numidian riders, those mercenaries of the rulers of Carthage. There were immense stores of food for men and animals and barracks for twenty-four thousand soldiers. The efforts of Roman leaders and of the Numidian kings, bribed and corrupted by the Romans, were often frustrated by the power of this fortress. The remains of the treble walls were found in the vicinity of the Kamart hill. Only one suburb, that facing the sea and known as Megara, was surrounded by a single wall. The historians supposed that it was against this weakest spot that Scipio led his attack. It was in this quarter that excavators found clay balls of the consistency of pottery used by the defenders of Carthage, fragments of weapons and a number of coins.

When discussing fortifications, one must pay homage to the ingenious strategy of Scipio. After several unsuccessful attacks, the Roman leader realized that the fortress could be captured only by a protracted siege which would cut off supplies of food and fodder. For this reason he built two lines of his own works all around the city, constructing two deep moats of over three miles in length parallel with the city walls. The Carthaginians must doubtless have chuckled at the Romans when they saw these

great siege plans, for they were able to dispatch their galleys from the port and thus obtain sufficient supplies of food and munitions.

According to the historians the Carthaginians possessed two ports, both built in the rocky shores, one of them a military basin and the other a commercial harbour. In the former there were no less than two hundred and fifty docks, adorned with beautiful Ionic porticoes and affording shelter for two hundred and fifty war-galleys, while stores and munitions were kept in the upper stories. On a peninsula in the centre of the port were the headquarters of the fleet, from where everything that took place in and around the harbour could be watched. Both ports were invisible from the sea. All that remains of the commercial harbour is its former basin, whereas the military port can be reconstructed in imagination on the lines of the marshy gulf where the Phœnician battle-galleys once rode. Ruins of the former fleet headquarters are also traceable on the peninsula.

According to historical tradition a dam was built by Scipio to prevent entry to and exit from the port. Giant stones discovered in the vicinity of El-Kram tend to confirm this theory. Thus blockaded on all sides, the Carthaginians gave final proof of their extraordinary efficiency and enterprise. Having lost almost the whole of their fleet in the continuous encounters with the Romans, the leaders of Carthage decided to build a new navy from such materials as could be found within the city, and with surprising rapidity constructed, manned and equipped fifty large triremes, together with a squadron of smaller boats. At the same time the population of the city, old men, women and children, worked on the excavation of a new canal to an unblockaded shore, where traces of this immense and desperate work can still be seen.

Through this channel the new Carthaginian fleet one day suddenly broke out into the sea and attacked the Roman

navy. Following this, the ingenious strategist, Scipio, abandoned the siege on the water-side and initiated fresh operations from the land, with the aid of new machines and catapults. After a bitter struggle the Romans ultimately succeeded in penetrating into the city and, fighting for every street and every building, at last reached the forum. For seven days the battle raged throughout the place, during which houses burned and fell and crowds of defenceless inhabitants sought refuge in underground vaults or rushed panic-stricken among the burning buildings and fallen debris, pursued by Roman soldiers and invoking the aid of the gods or begging the victors for mercy. But *Carthago delenda esse!* was the verdict of Rome, under which the beautiful city perished in flames and the inhabitants of the capital of Dido marked with their corpses the track of their hopeless flight and of the triumphal march of the legionaries.

The last ruler of Carthage, Hasdrubal, with a white band on his forehead as sign of mourning and submission, begged in vain for mercy at the hands of the iron-willed Scipio. Only Hasdrubal's wife, with her children and a few hundreds of brave citizens who would not surrender, withdrew to the temple of Esmun, the Carthaginian Adonis. On entering the courtyard of the temple she pronounced a curse upon the head of her cowardly husband and on the merciless victor and then set fire to the shrine of her god. The brave woman, with her children and with the *élite* of Carthaginian society, perished in the flames. The Church of St. Louis now towers over the place where this temple of Esmun once stood. Within the boundaries of the old quarter, Byrsa, where the royal palace and the houses of the city magnates were located, a large number of coins, jewels and other art objects have been excavated. Specimens of these can be seen in almost every French museum, although the majority have been deposited in the museum at Carthage. It may be that some of these bracelets and ear-rings once



adorned the proud wife of Hasdrubal, the last ruler of the Phœnician Empire.

The archæological investigations carried on by the French have yielded certain relics of the old Carthage, among which the necropoli and sarcophagi have proved the most interesting. These latter were unearthed two thousand years after they had been deposited for their eternal rest, and when their discoverer, Père Delattre, touched the corpses contained in them, these crumbled into ashes. However, I saw in the local museum some mummies which had remained intact through these twenty centuries! With them were found various objects and ornaments, almost all of which were of Egyptian origin. There were also images of good and evil spirits, made by Carthaginian artists. Vessels for food, wine and oil were discovered in one of the graves.

In the cemeteries and temple courts a number of stelæ to the goddess Tanit were unearthed. Some of the inscriptions on these stone slabs were deciphered, one of which is quoted by Monsieur Boissier :

“To the goddess Tanit, who is the visage of Baal, and to the ruler Baal Hammon—a sacrifice offered by Hasdrubal, the son of Hannon, for he heard the voice of the goddess. May her blessing be on him for ever.”

In Byrsa you can see and inspect a passage with brick walls and vaulting, part of the great underground cisterns, or municipal waterworks, which were once connected with the main aqueducts. A necropolis, built of large polished stones, can also be seen on the hill near by. This is practically all that still bears witness in our days to that ancient Carthage where the two poets, Virgil and Flaubert, found inspiration for their tragic heroines. These two royal ladies led a stormy life in the city, one at the time of its establishment, the other at the time of its downfall.

I have no hesitation in admitting that the echoes of the Punic wars and the names of Scipio, Hamilcar and Hasdrubal,



though they are men to whom the historians certify, make less appeal to my imagination than those of Dido, Sophonisba and Salamambo. Among the remains of Carthage, among its relics which still testify to the splendour of the ancient capital, every tissue of my soul felt the presence of their shades coming from the sombre depths of Erebus.

*Cartago delenda fuit* . . . and on her charred corpse rose and flourished a new city, the Carthage of the mighty Roman Empire. The St. Louis Museum bears ample witness to its art in the shape of precious statues, carved columns and inscriptions found among the ruins.

I wandered through two Roman amphitheatres where the rows of the stone seats, some of the marble columns and carved galleries are still *in situ*. Then I passed on to the Christian basilica erected in the early centuries of our own era, where I admired the beautiful mosaics of the floor, the ruins of the arcades, the tombstones and a font for the baptism of children. What prayers were whispered here to the Son of God, the God of the poor and the oppressed? Whose bodies lay in these graves? What tears were shed? Whose anxious eyes looked at these columns or, blinded by despair and grief, wandered aimlessly over the mosaics of the floor?

Desirous of finding answers to my questions, I returned to the larger of the two amphitheatres. Most of the giant structure had crumbled, save for some ruined walls, a segment of benches and *sedes*, the entrance to the circus, some shattered columns and heaps of stone and brick. In one place I was shown a narrow passage with Roman inscriptions adorning its walls, which led to a small, dark cell, where I saw a heap of old, rotten straw in a corner and was struck by the sharp odour that is so characteristic of wild animals' cages.

"What was this used for in Roman days?" I asked my guide, guessing the answer in advance.

"It was a cage for wild animals. Through the hole in

the ceiling the lions and panthers that were kept here were fed, and through this passage below they were driven into the arena."

However strange it may seem, I certainly smelled the penetrating odour of wild animals, although I knew the straw could have been there only a few years and that through the centuries all the odour must have disappeared without a trace; yet I felt the presence and smelled the odour of animals. I was afterwards told that an English writer, visiting this cage, had a similar impression.

I left the den and through the passage along which in years gone by a kingly lion stepped cautiously, blinded by the sun and frightened by the roar of the crowds, I returned to the arena. Across the tragic circle I noticed a little chapel, through whose barred gate a lamp glimmered over an altar. On the gate a Latin inscription commemorated the fact that Saints Revocatus, Saturn, Saturnine, Perpetua and Felicitas were torn to pieces by wild beasts on this arena.

And thus it was that I discovered what prayers were offered and what was awaited in mortal fear, there in the Christian basilica!

I returned to Tunis and, after having completed my notes and rested a bit, I went out again on a tour of the city.

Passing through the streets of Tunis, I found a relic of the Spanish rule in a gateway erected during the reign of Charles V. Then in the harbour I observed the progress of various constructional works undertaken by the French, who from year to year improve the conditions of navigation in the sandy and shallow gulf of Tunis and are thus transforming it gradually into an up-to-date seaport. Close to the shore rode some fishermen's boats loaded with sponges from the southern shores of Tunisia. This industry flourishes along the whole coast. Some of the fishermen wore necklaces of little shells, or *uda*, known as the *Cypræa moneta*, or the money-cowry. It is a talisman which is supposed to bring success to adults and health to children. I was reminded

of our own Tatra highlanders, who wear bands of similar shells on their round hats, and wondered from where the *Cypræa moneta* came to our mountains and what significance they carried.

In one of the boats I noticed an old, monstrous, witch-like woman, with a Star of Solomon tattooed on her forehead, shouting in a piercing voice, running up and down and throwing herbs and gravel into the water. I asked a man standing near by what was the cause of the anxiety and agitation of the old Berber woman. After going down and exchanging a few words with the fishermen, he returned to me with the following information :

"One of the men was drowned to-day during a storm. This old woman is a witch, and is now appealing to the sea to yield up the lost body of the fisherman, who, according to Mussulman tradition, must be buried in his own land."

I had seen many witches in North Africa, but so far all of them had appeared to be quite normal beings, following their profession with no abnormal manifestations and according to their traditional formulæ, provided of course they were not intoxicated by incense-smoke or through dancing. This one, however, betrayed every symptom of hysteria and nervous agitation. She was surrounded by a group of fishermen, and together they stood gazing into the water, carrying in their motionless, strained eyes what seemed to be a command to the sea that it should fulfil their desire.

Leaving them to search the waves, I strolled on to the outskirts of the city that lie on the side toward the Zaghuân mountains, from which an aqueduct of more than thirty miles in length was built by the Romans. Their example has in recent years been followed by the French, who have diverted the very same mountain-streams into cement canals and water-pipes.

Later I visited the picturesque district around the Jebel Bu Kornin, where I observed an old Roman medicinal

spring, the so-called *Aquæ Persianæ*, which contains an element of ordinary kitchen salt. Roman relics can be found everywhere in this section—the old town of Naro, an altar of Saturn, the ruins of Maxula and many more. An interesting point struck me here. Throughout North Africa a very common plant is the so-called “Berber fig,” a giant cactus producing fruit covered with thorns and used as food by the natives. Here in Tunisia I heard the natives call this tree *Kermus nesrani*, which means “the Christian fig.”

Two of the present-day cities in Tunisia particularly appeal to the imagination. The first of them, Susa, can be reached by railway; the other, Duiat, lies in the hilly Urghamma region south of Gabes beyond the realm of the “iron road.”

Susa was originally a Phœnician and later a Roman town and was once the camp of Hannibal, who fought Scipio in the Second Punic War. Later the Romans, after the collapse of Carthage, marched southward and established here a colony which was famous for its harvests.

In the mountains near by, Christian catacombs have been discovered. These comprise underground galleries extending for a distance of two or three miles. Several tiers of deep niches in the walls are sealed with stone slabs bearing still decipherable inscriptions. They are Christian tombs, of which no fewer than ten thousand have been found.

The present Archbishop of Algiers, Cardinal Leynaud, is the best living authority on these catacombs. No efforts have been spared to determine the epoch to which these relics belonged. The Latin inscriptions, such as Stertinus, Martialis, Flavia Domitia, Aurelius Respectus, Valeria Respecta and others, afford no indication as to the date of this Christian necropolis. It was only after a tomb was discovered bearing the inscription “Severus Lupo cos,” and after “cos” was interpreted as the word “consul,” abbreviated in accordance with the Roman practice, that a



clue to the approximate date of these catacombs was obtained. It was found that the consuls Lupo ruled the Roman colony over a very long period, the first in A.D. 42 and the last in 273. Later the tomb of Quintus Papius Saturninus Julianus, a centurion in the second Parthian legion, was excavated. The stone was placed during the reign of Septimius Severus, who ruled from A.D. 193 to 211 and during whose reign the Parthian legions were formed. In view of the fact that these inscriptions, though affording certain chronological indications, are not, however, the oldest in the Susa catacombs, Cardinal Leynaud and other historians have concluded that the construction of the necropolis must date back to the early days of Christianity, probably to the close of the first century of our era, that is, to the apostolic period. This theory is in complete accord with the words of St. Augustine addressed to the Christians of Africa in his *Enarrationes*, or Commentaries, on Psalm xlv. 23 :

“These are apostles who have linked you with the Christian world; they themselves were sent unto you to spread the lesson among you. They were your brothers in the faith.”

Thus the church of Africa was a church of the apostles.

There are certain indications that the Jews who came to Susa from Jerusalem helped to spread the word of Christ by announcing the advent of a Messiah, the Son of God, who with His miracles and His virtuous life gave proof of His divine origin. These Jews thus became the first apostles of Christ in this country.

Just as Susa represents the first step of Christian civilization in North Africa, so the little town of Duirat may be regarded as a relic of the primeval Troglodytes, or cave-men. This strange town is built on the slopes of the Tshenini mountain, and is formed by tier upon tier of caves in which the native Berbers dwell. Steps cut in the rock connect separate dwellings and give access to them from the streets.



The caves are dark and narrow, devoid of any comforts, even the most primitive, and are superior only to the underground galleries and dens of the Matmata valley in southern Tunisia, where human beings dwell like moles under the ground and where only those who lie in the shallow graves around the holes leading to this subterranean city remain on the surface of the earth.

Over these caves of the natives of Duirat, on the peak of the mountain, tower the ruins of the Kasba, once a mighty castle, now a deserted heap of stone and brick. By its side the temple of Allah stands out as the only architectural structure on the mountain-side.

It must not be thought, however, that the inhabitants of Duirat and those of the Matmata valley received by inheritance and have preserved the mode of life of the primeval Troglodytes. Tales of terrible days of misery and bloodshed still live in the old legends of these tribes, when hordes of enemies rushed through ancient Libya and wrought destruction in the land. It was then that the clans dwelling near Gabes began to migrate to the south. Having found a locality which they considered suitable for habitation and defence, they settled here and were able to defend their families and their wealth in these caves and subterranean camps. This period of migration most probably coincided with the advent of Sidi Okba, who established Islam throughout Africa by the power of his sword and ruled the country from his capital in Kairwan.

Similar cave-cities exist in Tibet, in China and also in the Russian Crimea at Chufut-Kaleh, and in each case there can undoubtedly be found an historical necessity that drove men into these underground hiding-places.

## CHAPTER X

### AMONG THE PROUD HIGHLANDERS OF KABYLIA

LEAVING the realm of the Carthaginians, so fraught with wonderment and memories, I retraced my steps across Tunisia and the eastern part of Algeria to the picturesque Jujura range in the Great Kabylia mountains. Travelling westward from Tunis, we passed through a fertile agricultural country dotted with Roman ruins—the aqueduct at La Manuba, the amphitheatre and cisterns in Teburba (*Thuburbo Minus*), the bridge at El-Bathan, the baths in the ancient *Simitthu*, now Chemtu, and the temple in *Thuburnica*.

This part of Tunisia forms the richest district of the French colony, a land of farmers and planters. In addition to the many large estates owned by French and Italians, there is a model farm maintained by the Jewish community and many well-cultivated fields in the neighbourhood of Jedeïda, Bordj Tum, Larga, Béja and Suk el-Arba. In this district I also had the opportunity to see the working of gypsum in the Lansarin mountains and of marble in Chemtu, from where the famous red and yellow Numidian marbles were secured by the Romans. In many sections we drove through beautiful olive-groves and excellent pastures.

At Ghardimau we crossed the Tunisian-Algerian frontier and entered a well-forested district, where the French administration experiences serious difficulties with the local natives, in that they set fire to these woods in order to obtain larger areas for pasture. According to the French regulations, cattle are not allowed in the forests; when, however, a wood is destroyed by fire, the ashes induce the

growth of rich and juicy grasses, on which the cattle are permitted to graze. This forms the chief reason for these forest fires for which the Arab shepherds are responsible. The country between the Tunisian frontier and Constantine is a wealthy granary, supplemented by vineyards, orchards and gardens on the surface and strata of iron ore and phosphates underground.

Making no stop at Constantine, we arrived late at night at the little railway station of Maillot, in the Kabylia mountains, where I was met by the Polish Consul, Monsieur Rosée, and the administrator of the district, Monsieur Charles Courtin. We proceeded to his house, a few miles away.

After a light meal the hospitable Monsieur Courtin showed me to my room, promising a very interesting excursion on the following day.

"An excursion is a delightful thing," I observed; "but what about some hunting?"

My host laughed genially.

"We have still two days before us. I want you to see our beautiful mountains and the highland tribes dwelling in them. I shall endeavour to show you many interesting things here, for you know Kabylia is the pearl of Algeria. All my knowledge of this country is entirely at your disposal."

And so it happened that, instead of going to bed after the long and tedious journey, I talked for several hours with Monsieur Courtin. I found him a keen observer and an excellent scholar, who drew my attention to several scientific sources, which I afterwards found most useful. When we finally parted it was four o'clock in the morning.

At eight Monsieur Rosée arrived and took me to his house, where we mounted saddled mules and, riding between Monsieur Courtin as guide and the native escort in our rear, we proceeded along a beautiful mountain road toward the Jujura.

The way led through a forest of oaks and ash-trees, past two villages that were fastened to mountain-peaks like eagles' nests. The eagles dwelling in them are Berbers of pure blood, descendants of the warriors of Masinissa, Syphax, Juba and Jugurtha, who can resist any attack against their mountain homes. On several occasions in their stormy history they have frustrated the attempts of Carthage and Rome and of the Arabs and Turks. The French, realizing the numerical strength of these tribes, have concluded written treaties with them, recognizing not only the law of the Koran, but in many cases also their *kanouns* and their local social customs. At present they are among the most loyal citizens of France in Algeria.

The villages are surrounded by the cultivated fields, vineyards and extensive fig- and olive-groves which constitute the natural wealth of this country. As we were passing the little hamlet of Saharij, I noticed that most of the trees were devoid of foliage and was told that the natives gather the leaves as fodder for their cattle. Everywhere the white burnouses of the people appeared in sharp contrast through the dark verdure of the groves.

"They 'milk' olive-trees here," explained Monsieur Courtin.

It appears that the Kabyles talk of "milking olive-trees" when they gather the fruit; and in fact the movements with which they pluck the olives remind one of the process of milking. The same movements, similarly described, can be observed among the Mongols of Urianhai when they gather currants, raspberries and other small fruit.

As the road climbed higher and higher up the slope of Akuker, the fig- and olive-groves gave way to oaks and, in some places, to Aleppo pines.

In the highest village we passed I observed a native mill made of two large stones, roughly cut, the upper part of which was turned by means of a clumsy wooden sweep. It is more than probable that mills of exactly this type

were used in the neolithic period of man's history, and were probably worked exclusively by the women, as they are to-day in Kabylia.

High up the trail we passed the two picturesque houses of the forest-rangers who guard the timber-lands from pilfering and arson. Mounting still higher, we reached the large plateau of Tala Rana, surrounded with magnificent oaks, among which stood a neat little house, the summer residence of Monsieur Courtin and the end of our journey.

A beautiful view extends from this altitude of four thousand five hundred feet over a fertile plain with squares of cultivated fields, dark olive-groves, the silvery Beurd and El-Ajiba rivers and the white walls of the little towns and miniature settlements. Peace and quiet reigned supreme, undisturbed by the echoes of human life and broken only by the rustling of the oaks, the ripple of a mountain-stream, the chirrup of birds or the whimpering of an eagle perched on a sharp, bare rock. You feel the proximity of heaven with its mystery enfolding the visage of God. . . .

"We must 'kindle peace,'" the Kabylean sherif remarked to his assistant.

"Very well," agreed the latter, who promptly retired to the kitchen to light the stove and prepare our luncheon.

"'Kindle peace?'" I repeated, looking inquiringly at my companions.

"This means to light a fire," explained Monsieur Courtin. "The Kabyles regard fire as an attribute and sign of hell, a weapon of the evil spirits, and will consequently never use this word."

After an excellent luncheon we set out on the still ascending trail that wound among giant trees, most of them cedars of enormous girth. They do not, however, tower high in the air like those in the Sayan mountains, but are, on the contrary, short, with wide-spreading branches, thick, strangely twisted trunks and interminably long roots,



often embracing large stones or rocks in their folds or penetrating into clefts and breaches, seeking support and water.

With the giant cedar-trees are mixed age-old oaks, both in their element as rulers of the mountain. As we climbed higher, the oaks became smaller and less imposing, while the mighty crowns of the cedars towered proudly over them; but these also disappeared when we reached an altitude of about six thousand feet.

As we were making our way through the forest, I heard an anxious cry, but could not recognize the voice.

"Monkeys! Monkeys!" suddenly exclaimed Monsieur Rosée, as he pointed to some rocks cropping out of the thicket.

Following his indication, I saw a monkey making for the dense growth of young oaks, followed by a file of at least fifty others. The old ones stepped cautiously, looking backward now and then, while the young ones jumped about gaily and the males marched on the flanks of the procession. Some of the females carried their little ones clinging to their backs. They were common monkeys, the inhabitants of mountain-forests and caves.

At the request of the Pasteur Institute, the French authorities have forbidden monkey-hunting in their colonies. Prior to this prohibition the Kabyles exterminated them because of the great damage they wrought in their fields. Now they are forced to adopt a different course of procedure. Catching a monkey in a trap, they sew on him a red vest with little bells attached and then let him loose. The unfortunate monkey hastens to his home, but his fellow-creatures, scared by the strange appearance of their kinsman, flee from him so persistently that the district is soon relieved of their undesirable presence.

Inasmuch as the Pasteur Institute says nothing about shooting at monkeys with a camera, I loaded my Kodak and started to climb the hill after the herd. I slipped and stumbled, for the slope was covered with fallen leaves



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and acorns. In the distance I heard some cries and at once began to imitate them. As the animals stopped crying, I repeated my ruse. After a time I heard a cautious sound close by and, looking around, noticed a handsome young specimen moving in my direction.

With my camera ready, I very courteously and even affectionately invited the monkey to come nearer, for the distance was still beyond the range of my lens. Then, as the little animal seated itself between two low branches, I began to approach and attempted with my every movement to convince it that I was just a mere passer-by, walking through the forest.

Suddenly I noticed another, apparently hiding in the grass, a red-haired, common rascal with evil yellow eyes, showing unmistakable signs of envy. That it was a rascal, and a jealous one at that, I was certain. It seemed quite evident that the monkey sitting in the tree was either a maiden or a newly wed. I even noticed obvious signs of vanity, for the little creature was apparently manicuring her nails and shaking dust and dry leaves from her now very fashionable fur. Her cavalier probably intended to make a scene because she wished to go and look at him who spoke the broken tongue of their kind; and, when the curious female persisted in spite of his entreaties, he followed her, spying on her movements and evidently having little trust in the constancy of her affections.

I stopped and raised the camera. The jealous escort fled, and she, adopting a most graceful pose, waited, blinking curiously at me. When the Kodak clicked, I thanked the handsome monkey for her courtesy and turned to rejoin my friends.

A cry reached my ears, in which I felt the very definite question:

“What? Is that all?”

Then suddenly I heard the loud, stentorian voice of the cavalier, who swore in a most undignified manner:



"You guttersnipe! You flirt! You . . ."

If any zoologist doubts that the red-haired monkey could be so low and common, I must refer him to Messieurs Rosée and Courtin, who will confirm my story from beginning to end.

After this interesting encounter, we proceeded on our way. The native sherif spoke fluent French and gave me many interesting particulars about the country and its inhabitants.

I was surprised to hear that one could often meet Mzabite traders in these Kabylia villages. From the sun-baked and barren Sahara, these men of mysterious Mzab, who still retain their ancient Carthaginian traditions, reach into this northernmost region of Algeria. Are they enticed to these constant wanderings by their hereditary love for adventure and by that spirit of enterprise that drove the Phœnicians from Tyre and Sidon to the distant shores of Britain, to Senegal, to the Persian Gulf and even to India, whence they brought back gold, precious stones and strange animals and birds?

The Mzabites are despised here, as in other Moslem districts; yet they are indispensable, for they have practically monopolized all the trade, agreeing to terms most favourable to the native farmers and no doubt to themselves. That no one can compete with the Mzabite traders may perhaps be due to the fact that in their veins flows the blood of those Phœnician and Carthaginian merchants who were once the foremost traders of the Mediterranean.

On our way back to Monsieur Courtin's house we descended through a dense oak-forest. Suddenly my heart quickened, for there by the trail I caught sight of deep, newly dug ruts, some marks on the bark of the trees and near them some tell-tale bristles.

"Boars," I whispered.

"Oh yes, we have plenty of them," replied Monsieur



Courtin, so indifferently that it made me think he was not an enthusiastic hunter.

Mounting our long-eared chargers, we returned to Maillot down the steep trail. The mules frequently had difficulty with the loose stones on the bridle-path. My own mount slipped once or twice and at last went down on its nose, throwing me and making me perform a none-too-graceful somersault. No damage was done, owing to the fact that I have had considerable experience and a good deal of practice during my Asiatic travels in this particular form of gymnastics.

The Mongolians taught me a very useful trick. They always say that, when a horse slips and falls in a dangerous place, the rider must "soften," leaving every muscle relaxed and making the body yield without resistance to the force of the fall. One must fall softly, without haste and without strain. As I automatically followed this advice in the Jujura, the tumble ended satisfactorily.

Monsieur Rosée suffered a like disaster, but he had unfortunately not my Mongolian experience to call upon and sustained injuries to his knee.

That evening at dinner, to which Monsieur Courtin had invited some officials and colonists, several subjects which were of great interest to me were discussed. All of those present agreed upon and emphasized the main characteristic of the Kabyles—their love of freedom and independence—which has given them the power to survive the struggles with foreign invaders, who have never succeeded in establishing absolute domination here. The Kabylean highlanders are fervent "patriots of the land." They love their mountains passionately and are more interested in the affairs of their own tribes and villages than in those of pan-Islamism.

Apparently the oldest and purest Berbers are of different origin from the other inhabitants of Algeria. In fact, ethnographical research has proved that the Kabyles

resemble the ancient dwellers of the Lower Nile and that their dialect is related to the tongues used by the inhabitants of Egypt and Abyssinia.

These hillmen in certain districts boast that they are descended in a direct line from the Romans, which is historically quite possible, inasmuch as the Empire had colonies in this region. From an ethnographical point of view, the light complexions and fair hair of some of the Kabyles suggest northern, possibly Roman, origin. Another bit of evidence is supplied by the fact that the characteristic designs of early Christian art are often embodied in Kabylean carvings.

Native families in these mountains join together and form a village, several of which constitute a tribe, which is governed by a *jemaa*, or tribal council, and by a supreme court, where each inhabitant has a vote. The tribes are ruled not only by the Koranic law that runs in all Moslem countries but also by their own local statutes, or *kanouns*, which are partly written and partly traditional.

Not infrequently the *kanouns* are in disagreement with the Koran and present considerable difficulty to the French administrators in the government of a country in which there is such great diversity of psychology and tradition among its inhabitants. This applies particularly to the administration of justice. For instance, the *kanouns* do not recognize imprisonment, as the curtailment of liberty for any offence is an idea totally alien to a Kabyle's psychology. Corporal punishment is applied in rare cases and, depriving, as it does, the individual of dignity and honour, is almost invariably followed by banishment or voluntary disappearance.

Blood-feuds and vendettas are still very popular among the Kabyles, as they are among all Berbers. The phrase "There is a *kono* between me and the family of . . ." is often heard in the Jujura. The carrying out of the revenge is a point of honour, a duty, and the hillman who shirks

it is despised by all. The vendetta not infrequently takes the form of a summary execution, as in general practice some member of the injured family kills the wrongdoer or one of his near relatives.

Sometimes, however, the revenge is accomplished according to a well-defined, grim etiquette. After a Kabyle has been killed, the family of the murderer comes to the victim's house bringing an ox-horn containing the *dia*, or price of blood, usually the sum of twenty duros, or Spanish dollars. The *dia* is usually accepted, and the horn deposited in a secret hiding-place. Revenge is, however, taken in spite of the *dia*, and the latter is immediately returned as the price of blood to the family that sent it. When the vendetta is not followed up after the price of blood has been accepted, the Kabyles say :

"The family of Mahmed ben Ismail have still the horn filled with silver, which is waiting for a brave man to empty."

During these feuds some Berbers refrain from washing or cutting their hair and wear a rope dipped in pitch on their heads to remind them constantly of the revenge which is to be taken.

Some tribes, however, realize the communal danger from vendettas and bring such cases before the *jemaa*, which defines the amount of the *dia* in accordance with the tribal *kanouns*.

As punishment for a crime done with malice aforethought the house of the criminal is destroyed, twenty of his oxen slain for the benefit of the community and the whole *dia* of twenty duros paid to the family of the victim. In some cases the parents or family of the victim may choose between receiving the price of blood or having the blood of the murderer brought to them.

If a Kabyle kills a thief in his own house he must still pay the twenty duros, to which the *jemaa* usually adds another twenty for the family of the assassinated chief. For the murder of a stranger who has molested the honour

of a Kabyle woman no *dia* is paid, nor has any one the right to demand it.

After the *dia* has been paid under a judgment of the *jemaa*, the felon cannot be further persecuted and may return and dwell in safety in the village if he has already fled from it.

The Kabyles believe that, if a crime remains unavenged, an evil bird, *hama*,<sup>1</sup> settles on the roof of the victim's house and cries :

“ My thirst must be quenched ! ”

They know that only the blood of the murderer can quench the thirst of this bird, which usually lives in cemeteries and about fields where battles have once raged.

It is easy to realize how difficult the rôle of French governors and judges can be in this land where *kanouns* and blood-feuds are so firmly established by the traditions of the warlike highlanders.

Strict and pure Islam has also to contend with many difficulties here. The Kabyles, although they boast large numbers of Marabouts, are not regarded as a pious people by strict Mohammedans. It is true that they respect their Marabouts, but only because they are experts in the occult sciences and by their mysticism appeal to the primitive minds of the highlanders.

The Consul pointed out to me a building down on the plain.

“ That is the *kubba* of the Marabout Sidi Amer Sherif, who is held in great respect by the natives. He lived here during the Turkish rule. One of the beys, worried by the continuous disturbances among the Kabyles, decided to build a fortress in the neighbourhood of Tizi-Uzu and, in order to accomplish this, ordered that the house and olive-grove of the Marabout Sherif should be destroyed.

<sup>1</sup> The Russian and Persian *hamayun* is undoubtedly of the same linguistic origin as the Arab *hama*. I believe that the origin of the idea could be traced to India.



Learning this, the Marabout pronounced on the head of the bey a powerful curse such as only a *wali* beloved by Allah would dare to use :

“ Let the power belonging to thee, bey, perish. Become a mere woman, who must yield to all the whims of man ! ”

When the bey opened his eyes in the morning, he was transformed into a woman dressed in silks and jewels. The sultan sent a new viceroy, and the bewitched bey was taken to the harem, where he became the new bey's favourite wife. Soon, however, the victim of the Marabout's curse guessed who it was that had so cruelly revenged himself upon him. The favourite wife of the new bey thereupon begged her “ husband ” to destroy the fortress and return the land to the Marabout, together with a munificent reward. When the bey had fulfilled the wish of his “ wife,” she at once became a man. This story is very popular with the Kabyles, who always speak with contempt of the Turks. Apparently the Turks must have made themselves very unpopular here, for the allusions made to them in native songs and proverbs are by no means flattering.

The women of Kabylia enjoy considerably more freedom than their sisters in other Moslem countries, although the *kanouns* and supplementary tribal legislation give to them a position of slavery and contempt. However, the struggle to maintain the independence of the country, which has been fought by the Kabyles against the Romans, Vandals, Greeks and Turks has often placed the native woman by the side of her husband or father in battle, which has produced a shadow of respect among the men for their women-folk and has given them the opportunity of obtaining certain unwritten privileges. Thus it happens that in Kabylia women are often found as the heads of families, as counsellors to their husbands on all their affairs or as members of religious sects, and even take part in the deliberations of the *jemaa* and appear in public without veils.

If you meet a veiled woman in a Kabylia village or



town, you may be certain that she belongs to a family of Marabouts of Arab origin who recognize the local *kanouns*, although they may remain faithful to the text of the Koran on important questions.

The ceremonies and etiquette of Kabylia marriages also differ from those of the surrounding tribes. Prior to entering her husband's house, the bride parades through the surrounding villages on a mule, followed by an escort of relatives and friends, while the crowds shout with joy and set off fireworks. Neighbours offer her baskets full of beans, nuts or dried figs, from each of which she must take a handful, press it to her mouth and replace it in the basket. These offerings are all received into large bags carried by old women and are borne back to increase the personal estate of the newly wed couple.

As the bride approaches her new home, her women friends surround her and hand her a vessel containing melted butter, into which she dips her hands, thus assuring to herself future prosperity and wealth. They then offer her raw eggs, which she breaks on the mule's head—an operation supposed to render the couple immune from evil spells and charms. After dismounting and before entering the house, the bride must drink a little sweet and a little sour milk with water, after which she must fling handfuls of corn and salt over her right and her left arm to bring blessings and prosperity to the new home. It is only after all these rites have been performed that the bridegroom approaches his betrothed, and either touches her with the edge of a knife or discharges a gun over her head in token of the wife's absolute submission to the wish of her husband, who from that moment becomes the master of her life and death.

After these ceremonies the bride at last enters the house, always remembering that she must step over the threshold with her right foot. The husband then carries her into the house in his arms, leaving all the friends and relatives in

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the yard outside. The bride soon reappears and dances among her guests and a feast begins, accompanied by music and songs and the offering of wedding-gifts. During the ceremony the Kabyles repeat the word "*You! You!*" which, according to philologists, corresponds with the Roman wedding-cry of "*Yo!*"

During feasts of this kind one can learn much about Kabyle music and poetry. The ceremony is usually opened by songs in praise of the bride, which are sung by the men.

Here are a few verses quoted from Certeux :

O feet of mine, how many miles have you tramped !  
How much dust have you raised before you came to her !  
My friends brought unto me my beloved Msuda,  
Like unto hawks from the mount of Agar bringing a white lamb.  
Order my mother to take out bracelets, necklaces and silken fabrics,  
For the young bride has arrived.  
The breasts of Msuda are like the round hilts of swords !  
O daughter of Bu Zarr, your plaits are heavy !  
O my beauty ! I shall love you from dawn until sunset !

There are many wedding-songs similar to the above, and all of them contain picturesque metaphors comparing a woman's beauty to various animals, objects, stars, the sun or the night, in which they are identical with similar poetry of other Oriental nations.

While these lines of praise are being sung, guns are discharged and fireworks set off outside to scare away evil spirits. This custom is also observed in the Caucasus, in Persia and among the Buddhists of China.

Late at night, when the feast is well advanced, bards appear and recount legends of various mythological persons or of feats of Kabyle bravery from the period when the warrior highlanders defended their eagle's-nests against the Turks. These songs are more or less similar to the one translated by L. Ferat in 1862 :

Beni Fufut and the merchants have sent to us their men, who say :  
" Arise against the oppressors !

The day of Holy War has come."

I praise the Hannashi who rose first against the Turks.

It is the bravest of all tribes !

On that day a dense mist was caused by the smoke of gunpowder,  
And men fell like autumn leaves.

Brother Kabyles ! What wretch will stay at home to-day ?

In spite of all these pompous ceremonies a Kabyle can, immediately after the wedding, return his wife to her native home by paying from seven to fourteen francs for a divorce. For slandering a women, a Kabyle is liable to a fine of from fifty centimes to one franc fifty. However, a serious offence involves a duel and a settlement of the matter by the *jemaa*.

The funeral ceremonies of the Kabyles are also distinctive and worthy of note. As soon as a member of a family dies, piercing shrieks and lamentations issue from his house. The yard and the house are then crowded with relatives and neighbours, who join in the lamentations and beat brass gongs to scare away the evil spirits. Even the dogs add their howls to the noise. By the side of the deceased's bed a vessel filled with coal and burning incense is placed, together with a number of lighted candles, as a sacrifice to the spirits. The laments continue throughout the night. Immediately after the dawn representatives of the tribe arrive, mourning and praising the dead, while the servants and slaves tear their garments and the women tie thick ropes around their waists, smear their faces with mud and lime and wrap their heads in rags. The nearest female relatives score their foreheads and cheeks with their nails.

After some time one of the friends of the deceased mounts the mule to which the body has been fastened and sets out at the head of a cavalcade of riders for the cemetery, where the usual funeral ceremonies, identical with those observed in all other Mussulman countries, take place.

On the day following the interment the dead man's

charger, saddled and hung with his arms and his best garments, is led through the village, where crowds of friends surround the horse and go through a rhythmic funeral dance to the sound of music and songs in praise of the deceased, lamenting his death in these words given by Certeux :

Woe, woe unto all of us !

Where is he ? Young women, where is your lover ?

A young vulture has left the great reaches of the sky.

Arise, arise ! Say but one word that will drive the enemy away.

When he appeared in the streets, his eyes shone like flames, a heavenly fragrance issued from his hair.

Let us weep ! The panther is glad. Can you hear the wild beast breaking boughs in the age-old forest ?

Let us weep ; for he who fought her will not rise again.

Let us weep ; for now the advent of a Turkish bey is near, who will set up his camp where our dwellings now stand.

Woe ! Woe !

The Mzabite merchants brought into Kabylia new funeral motives and new words, most of which are songs of the nomads of the desert in praise of the valour of the intrepid warriors of the Sahara.

He was brave like a cock ;

His heart was that of a lion ;

He sprang forward like a boar ;

His wisdom was greater than the cunning of a fox ;

He was as swift as a wolf and as faithful as a dog ;

His hands were always open, his sword unsheathed ;

His lips knew but one word.<sup>1</sup>

The next morning we drove over by car to the Tirurda and Lalla Khedija mountains by a road that wound between well-cultivated fields and olive-groves and past a steep hill crowned by a native village. Here we were met by the caïd of several villages, Si Yusuf Hamush, a Marabout held in great respect by the population.

<sup>1</sup> This signifies honesty and the strict observance of his promises.

He was tall and slim, with handsome features and keen eyes, and greeted us courteously in Oriental fashion. He spoke French fluently. We mounted the mules which were in readiness for us and proceeded toward the village, accompanied by the Marabout and a number of members of the local *jemaa*. The path was so narrow and steep that it could be easily defended by a few rifles and was the only approach to the village, which was surrounded by dense thickets of thorny fig-trees, forming an impassable barrier.

The houses were small and neat. After visiting some of the natives in their homes, we inspected the mosque, which was being reconstructed, and later a native smithy, a workshop of those primitive men to whom Hephæstus had given fire and iron. Then, after a call upon the master and pupils of a native school, we were served some excellent coffee, together with a bottle of liqueur. Mindful of the prohibitions of the Koran, we left the bottle intact.

The visit over, the caïd and his suite accompanied us back to the car and we proceeded on our journey to the main chain of the Jujura, where we stopped at the little house of the district *cantonnier*, or technical supervisor of the district, Monsieur Metayer. With him was also the caïd, Zerdan Rabah, to greet us at his door. Leaving the car here, we accompanied Monsieur Metayer along a new road to the base of the Tirurda mountain, where there was a shelter for tourists.

Here we struck into a narrow trail which brought us soon to the Tizi Uaban mountain at an altitude of six thousand three hundred feet, where we found large cedar-trees that provided welcome shade for the sun-scorched traveller. Before us extended a deep, ever-widening valley, with a grey village in the mountain-pass; further, like lifeless, stony waves of the sea, stretched the ever lower and lower mountain-chains. Over them a mighty eagle sailed noiselessly, seeking his prey. There is an abundance



of it here, as evidence of which several partridges fluttered away as we began to mount the Tirurda.

When our Consul insisted that I should ascend right up to the peak of the Tirurda, to which Monsieur Metayer promised to lead us by a short, direct route, I was none too enthusiastic over an excursion of this type on a broiling hot day, but I did not later regret the effort.

The Jujuras extended everywhere as far as the eye could see, winding like giant serpents from east to west in several parallel lines. French settlements, such as Fort National, and native villages clung to the lower slopes; silvery rivers and streams gleamed in the distance; forests and groves made dark shadows against the background of the plain; sheep and rams crept along the green slopes like weird white insects; while in the distance the broad surface of the sea ran out to the northern horizon.

From the peak we descended rapidly down its eastern slope and soon returned to Monsieur Metayer's house, where a table spread in a picturesque arbour invited us to a feast of excellent preserves, roast partridges and champagne. Our courteous host, who is a pioneer of Algeria, for he was born in this country, regaled us with some of his interesting hunting adventures in bygone days, when double-barrelled guns were unknown and only rifles were used.

Small and robust, with a red, hearty face and keen dark eyes, he seated himself in a comfortable armchair and lighted a cigar, over which the old *cantonnier* continued his stories for a long while. All his tales were picturesque and teemed with life and action.

From the Jujura we returned to Maillot for dinner, where a pleasant surprise awaited me, in that some of my Polish countrymen had arrived from Algiers to take part in the boar-hunt on the morrow. At dawn on the following morning we started in two cars on our hunting expedition, as the meet was fixed some thirty-odd miles away. It was

a cold morning with a sharp east wind, so that we arrived at our destination half-frozen. There was little in this experience to remind one of Africa.

The hunt was to take place in the vicinity of the villages of Tijeremt and Tashachit, where we were met by the local caïd, Khedis Ahmed, who was a great friend of France and a Chevalier of the Legion of Honour. At his house the whole party were waiting—my Polish countrymen, Monsieur Metayer with his son and brother-in-law, as well as the Marabout Zerdan Rabah, a cousin of the caïd and my companion in our mountaineering expedition of the previous day.

It was an imposing cavalcade when, surrounded by a crowd of natives on horseback and on foot, we started on our way toward the mountains that were visible in the distance; but, unfortunately, the day did not net us a bag at all in keeping with the strength of our artillery and the force of our beaters. A single boar, brought down by Monsieur Godziszewski, was the only reward outside of the experience of seeing the Kabyle beaters and hunters at work. However, the beautiful view of the mountains, the picturesque groups of white-clad beaters, the partridges constantly breaking from cover and the thrilling moments of expectation which are dear to the heart of every sportsman compensated my personal disappointment.

That afternoon I was already at the railway station taking leave of our most courteous host and of my new friends. As the train started, I watched through the windows of my compartment the rapidly disappearing mountain-chain and pondered over the very marked changes that must have taken place here in Great Kabylia.

These warlike, proud highlanders, with their ingrained love of freedom, have fought desperately and bravely wave after wave of invaders—the cunning Phœnicians, the solid Roman legions, the savage Vandals the militant Turks and the fanatic Arabs.

Yet through these centuries nothing in their tribal life seems to have changed, for the ancient *kanouns*, the archaic *jemaa*, the age-old vendetta and the Marabout-sorcerers carry down from one millennium to another. Yet parallel with all this one now finds Monsieur Courtin, Cantonnier Metayer, French officials, doctors and farmers, with peace, quiet, mutual respect and recognition of the rights of each cementing the whole. Here no one will insult a foreigner, no one will attack him, no one will attempt to betray his confidence. In the little house on the Tala Rana one feels as safe as on the grand boulevards in Paris.

This is the effect of true civilization, the results not only of the work of engines and machines but of the efforts of the human intellect. The lack of this civilization of intellect in Europe is the chief grievance and criticism of the coloured races against Europe. The example of Kabylia refutes this accusation.

## CHAPTER XI

### THE TALE OF AKUB BEN GMALI

DURING the last days of my stay in Algiers I fortuitously established a very interesting contact that supplied me with additional information regarding the life and customs of the natives and helped to uncover further their souls—incidentally, perhaps, some of the soul of the white race as well. It began one day during a visit to the local museum, when I noticed an old, withered man eagerly scanning some prints representing scenes in Algiers during the Turkish rule. Having never before seen these or any similar ones, I asked his permission to look through the interesting collection. In response the old gentleman mumbled his name, and I also introduced myself.

It turned out that my new friend had in his young days been a seaman and a merchant and knew Algeria and Tunisia well ; for, though living in France, he often visited these African lands. Becoming interested in conversation, we repaired to a café, where Monsieur Dufait told me a great deal about the life and the conditions of the country. Finally he asked :

“ Would you care to listen to a curious story which ended in this very city ? It was at the time when I was wandering about Algeria trading in dates and had as an assistant an old Arab, Akub ben Gmali, who told it me.”

As this was treasure-trove for me, I naturally welcomed his suggestion with enthusiasm, and, to keep the tale as simple as possible and avoid some of the redundancies of form when we transfer a live story to the printed mould, I shall here set down without quotation-marks the narrative old Akub ben Gmali told his master, as the Arab sat sipping





31. TUNISIAN DANCER





32. TYPICAL SOUS TRIBESMEN

hot tea and chewing dates one day just after they had come in from the desert.

If such be the will of Allah, things may happen to a man which often quite change his fate. The rocks of Dahra which we passed this morning reminded me of bygone days—bygone because I was young then and keen as an eagle. With a friend I guided a caravan of merchants as far as the banks of the Niger and to Timbuktu, from where we brought back ivory and wild-animal skins. Safur el-Jid was his name, though more often than not he was called "El-Sherif," for power and authority seemed to flow of themselves into the hands of this youth. He was brave and strong, and his language so flowing and easy that he could entertain crowds in the markets of Marrakesh and collect francs as though they were streams of water. One day, when we were sitting in a caravanserai in Tunis, where we had arrived from Figig with some hundred camels loaded with dates, we noticed a foreigner plying the proprietor of the caravanserai with eager questions. The conversation was long, for the innkeeper had apparently great difficulty in understanding the language of the stranger. At last all seemed to be clear, and he beckoned us to follow him into his private room.

"Listen," he said, "I have a customer for you and shall obtain fine terms for you, provided you pay me twenty-five duros. Agreed?"

The proposal proved indeed very excellent, and a few days later El-Sherif and I were already swaying on our camels, trying to guess the object of our journey.

It was certainly a strange expedition. Our foreign employer ordered us to load the camels with all sorts of merchandise and head for Amismiz in the High Atlas, where the warriors of the Shlu tribe live. But who did the foreigner expect would buy his goods in that country of beggars and bandits? What did he hope to receive in return except a blow from a curved yataghan? We could find out nothing

from the sidi, for he rode in silence, absorbed in his thoughts ; nor could we glean anything from his eyes, for they were hidden behind black glasses.

It was a long and difficult journey. Our burnouses and boots were torn to shreds by the time we reached Amismiz, where a new surprise awaited us. As soon as we had unladen our camels, the foreigner ordered us to take them to a lonely pasture and to wait there until he summoned us ; for he wanted us to lead the caravan on the return journey, which would, however, be much shorter, he told us with a meaning smile on his inexpressive, mysterious face.

We did, Sidi, as we were ordered by the foreigner. We had been promised good pay and cared very little about other matters. And why should we meddle in the affairs of our employer ? Allah sends rich gain to pious men. Blessed be the name of Allah ! *Insh Allah !*

That evening, when Safur el-Jid and I sat by the fire in the tent, eating our *kouskous* and listening to our camels plucking the grass and leaves outside, we suddenly heard the stealthy approach of a man. Going out, we saw a Shlu tribesman, who soon reached the tent and, greeting us in the name of Sidi ben Yakub, exclaimed :

" You are committing a great crime by serving a foreigner who is doing a wrong to our tribe."

" Our business is to supply camels and to lead the caravan," my friend retorted.

" Come to-morrow to the middle *suk*, and I shall show you something. You can judge for yourself what to do afterward," said the stranger and, wrapping his burnous closely round him, disappeared in the darkness.

Curiosity tormented us throughout the night. At last the dawn came, and after the morning prayer El-Sherif set out for Amismiz, leaving me to look after the camels. The sun was setting behind the snowy mountains before my friend returned, absorbed in thought.

" Tell me all about it ! " I exclaimed impatiently.

He looked intently at me and then spoke :

"So far I know very little . . . I can only guess. . . . But I shall tell you what I saw. When I reached the *suk*, I at once noticed our visitor of yesterday waiting for me. Without saying a word he took my arm and led me to a large caravanserai whose gates were closed. My guide apparently knew the place well, for he showed me a secret opening in the wall through which we could see everything that was happening inside. I saw our sidi, sitting proud and pompous and giving orders in Arabic like a *caïd*. Women were being brought before him for his examination. He first looked at them intently, then told them to sit down, to rise, to kneel, to carry a jug of water on their right shoulders and to walk in front of him. After this each one of them had to dance before him. Then they would sing, bow to the foreigner and disappear. To some of them our sidi gave presents, which an old man who stood near him took from among the goods which we brought with us here.

"What do you think of this in the depth of your soul ? " I asked Safur.

After a moment he replied :

"My thought is like a tree-top which divides itself into two branches. I know not which one to choose. Perhaps the *giaour* likes the beautiful, slim women of this tribe and comes hither for amusement."

"By Sidi Abu Median ! It is a long way to come for amusement," I exclaimed.

"That is my opinion too," my friend agreed.

"Then I think our sidi is buying slaves. I understand this, but I cannot understand what crime we are committing. Our Prophet does not prohibit slavery. So why did this dog in the burnous bark and threaten us so ? " I asked El-Sherif.

Safur el-Jid was silent for a while.

"It is not prohibited to the children of the Prophet,



but it is to foreigners by their laws. If we are caught by the French, the sidi will go to prison and we shall be judged by the caïd."

"What shall we do, then?" I queried anxiously.

"We must demand double pay for the return journey," he replied with a merry chuckle. "On my way back from Amismiz I was reckoning what it would amount to, and it was a nice bit of money."

"May Allah guard us from evil!" I whispered; and this concluded our conversation, for everything had been wisely planned out by Safur el-Jid.

All went well, and a few weeks later we were on our way back with an entirely different cargo on the backs of our rested camels—litters with women in them, for our foreigner in the black glasses bought fifty from the tribe of the Shlu and rode ever at the end of the caravan as we journeyed on. When we were well on our way, a rider on a beautiful chestnut overtook us and, calling us aside, said in low tones:

"I warned you that you were committing a crime by aiding the giaour to abduct slaves from our tribe. That infidel dog will scatter them throughout the wide world, and never, never will their eyes see again their native mountains and snows."

"Allah is One in heaven!" mumbled El-Sherif evasively. "We do not trade in women. Our business is to carry goods for others."

"Very well," sighed the strange rider, "but promise me one thing! If any one asks you the name of the giaour say that you do not know, but that you think he is a Greek."

"Is that all?" we asked.

"Yes . . . almost . . . But I'll add this: do not fire a bullet from your guns and do not show the edge of your yataghans to the sun in defence of that giaour."

"You have spoken," we agreed. "*Salaam aleikum!*"

When the rider had disappeared in the distance, the Greek



called me to his side and asked me what the conversation was about.

"Oh, nothing very interesting, Sidi," I explained. "He wanted to tempt us with a bag of ten duros to take him along with us to Tunis."

"We aren't going to Tunis," exclaimed the Greek. "And don't you dare to take any one into the caravan. Here are ten duros for you, and remember."

"You have commanded, good, generous Sidi, and your will has plunged into my soul, like a stone into water."

And so we continued our journey further and further along the old eastern road until we came to the Muluya River, where the Greek ordered us to halt and pitch three large tents, in which he placed his "goods," while we were sent across the river with the camels. Only from a distance could we see the women, who repaired to the bank of the river to bathe, to wash their garments and to fetch water for their food. We remained there for two days and began to fear that we might starve our camels, for there was no fodder about, nothing but bare stones and sand. However, on the third day about fifteen riders arrived, whereupon the Greek bargained with us for the purchase of half of our camels, loaded them with the tents and their inhabitants and dispatched them all northward with the new escort. The same procedure took place at the Hamin River, so that at last only ten camels remained. Three of them carried litters when we ourselves turned toward the north, carefully avoiding all cities and larger settlements.

"Whither shall I lead you, Sidi?" asked Safur, when we had reached the great caravan road.

"To Algiers!" ordered the Greek, as he lighted his cigar.

We were approaching a large city and could distinguish quite clearly the minarets and the grey walls of the houses, reaching to the very edge of a deep ravine. We led the camels round by a detour, knowing that our sidi did not

like crowded places and surmising that he had some good reasons for his dislike. When the city had been ridden out of sight, a strange horseman appeared on the road, who let the caravan pass him and looked searchingly at our tents and packs, as though he were a French Customs official. After a few moments he overtook us and rode up to Safur, asking him if he knew the name of the foreign merchant.

"No, I do not," replied my friend, "but I think he is a Greek."

"Thank you," said the horseman, as he turned away in peace.

Apart from this nothing exciting or unusual happened, one day following the other without any adventure to break the monotony of travel. But one thing developed that surprised me. My friend, who usually rode on the leading camel, which, because of its size, he called the "tower of Hassan," suddenly ceased to sing and joke and took to travelling on foot beside one of the litters. Sometimes I thought that I could hear the echoes of conversation and once, when the wind blew in my direction, I finally made out these words :

"By Allah ! I shall not leave you."

"By the Prophet, Whose Name be praised from one end of the earth to the other, he surely does not swear this oath to the giaour," I thought to myself.

Indeed it was not the Greek to whom my friend spoke thus. One evening, when we had been searching for a well so long that darkness had settled upon us, I stole quietly toward the camel with the litter and then I understood it all. Safur walked by the side of the camel, holding the hand of a young woman who was bending down to him. They talked with each other and seemed to hear and see nothing else.

"Be careful ! The Greek has eyes like el-Aïn," I whispered in warning to him.

He started and jumped aside, while the woman disappeared behind the curtains. After walking for a short distance in silence by his side I asked :

“ Do you love her ? ”

“ *Insh Allah !* ” replied Safur. “ I want her as my wife. I want her and I will have her ! ”

El-Sherif was proud and self-conscious ; but he did not realize that, in speaking these words of pride, he had offended Allah.

On that same night, when we had finally camped in a narrow valley by the bed of a dried-up river, a band of horsemen attacked us.

“ Fire at them, fire ! ” shouted the Greek.

We prepared ourselves for our own defence, clenching our yataghans in our teeth and loading our rifles ; but to defend a giaour we had no intention. Soon everything was quiet again, for the riders had disappeared like the ghosts of night. Yet we stayed in our hiding-place until the dawn, when a hideous scene smote our eyes. The tents were torn and strewn about the plain ; our cooking-vessels, that had stood by the fire, were smashed. All the women were gone, and only the Greek was left—with his throat cut ! None of our camels was hurt, nor were our supplies of food and water taken. The sole objects missing were the red bridle and the saddle of the camel on which the litter of Safur el-Jid's beloved had been carried.

With burning eyes and clenched lips Safur minutely examined everything, searched for the marks of men's feet and of horse's hoofs, picked up some objects from the grass and later howled despairingly, just as a mad jackal howls in the wilderness during the winter rains. The camels, startled by the noise, broke from their resting-place and sought safety in the hills.

When Safur had recovered himself, he helped me to collect the camels, harnessed one of them and, as he mounted, mumbled to me :

"Take the caravan to Algiers and wait for me in fat Akbar's caravanserai in the Kasba."

Then he was away and soon out of sight.

The end of our tale was a sad one, Sidi. Some one found the dead Greek and reported the fact to the caïd of the nearest district. Every one who was known to have passed near the place where the murder was committed was at once arrested. I shared this fate too, Sidi. For over six months the judges continued to investigate my case before they let me go. I lost my camels and the bag with the duros which I had earned from the Greek. Such was the will of Allah, although I suffered innocently, as the Sidi can judge for himself, for I have told him nothing but the truth. Why should I lie about such an old adventure?

Once free, I made my way to Algiers with difficulty and repaired to the fat Akbar. I kept close in his caravanserai for many days, afraid to ask for Safur, fearing that they might drag me to the court again. Finally, one day Akbar came up to me and whispered that some two months ago Safur el-Jid had inquired for me. The old man was in a talkative mood and soon told me of the fate of my friend.

"Safur had the eye of an eagle and the nose of a jackal!" Abkar was saying.

"He *had*?" I interrupted him.

"Yes, he had, for he is now no more," retorted the fat man, impatient at my interruption. "He found the man who stole his Shlu girl. It was one Bab ben Senussi, a rich merchant who owns a whole street in the Kasba of Algiers. He was always a robber by profession, and it was from robbery that he secured the beginnings of his riches. Safur reached Ben Senussi's house, discovered his bridle and his saddle, from which a bit of the metal mounting was missing, the very piece that he had found in the grass at the encampment. He managed to get into the garden, saw his beloved and arranged everything for her escape. On the

appointed day he entered the harem, disguised as an old witch ; but at that very moment Bab ben Senussi returned home. When Safur tried to escape from the house of his foe, Ben Senussi recognized a man under the woman's garments and ghastly things took place, for Safur killed Senussi, with whom he fought outside the house, but lost his own life from his wounds. The crowd that gathered round them laughed at seeing the fat merchant fighting an old and haggard woman. But soon the steel of knives glistened and the street was empty. The crowd dispersed in fear of the police on seeing the two bodies fall in a pool of blood outside the open doors of the house, from which the servants began promptly to flee, carrying with them the rich goods that had belonged to their master and followed by the women of the harem, who had so suddenly regained their liberty.

\* \* \* \* \*

Some time after I heard this narrative of Akub ben Gmali from Monsieur Dufait, I found in the Kasba the narrow street of El-Senussi Khab. It was merely a passage-way, for the balconies of many of the houses joined above, forming a long and sombre tunnel. I was struck by the appearance of one of the dwellings, which was just as dirty and neglected as the others but had a beautiful gate made of old marble, some slabs of ancient Arab mosaic and carved cedar-wood doors.

"Who is the owner of this house!" I asked a passing French postman.

"At present it is a warehouse of a commercial firm, but it belonged once to an Arab merchant, Bab ben Senussi," the postman replied.

"The one who was killed by . . . ?" I began to question.

"I do not know much about it, Monsieur, but I think there was some sort of a crime committed here. *Oh ! ces Arabes !*"



"Still, was not Safur right?" asked Monsieur Dufait as he finished the tale.

"Well, he certainly was unjustly treated," I answered evasively.

"Yes, it was all so unjust that it could only be avenged in that way, in a manly way!" the old man exclaimed. "Surely you would not expect him to bring his case before a caïd's court."

Apparently Monsieur Dufait felt the tragedy of Safur very keenly.

Following our first meeting, I repeatedly invited him to come to my hotel, but he persistently refused and only finally answered my direct question with:

"You have a wife and a home, an atmosphere which is not for me. I became envious, unsociable and even rude."

Anxious to continue our interesting chats, I invited him one day to the Pêcherie to have some oysters and a bottle of Kebir Impérial with me.

When we had taken our places at a table near the edge of the pavement and Monsieur Dufait had begun telling me about the pirate rule in Algiers, there suddenly appeared a group of gaudily dressed women, of whom one jangled a tambourine in her hand and began to shout in a shrill voice:

*"Gezzana, gezzana!"*

I had seen such women before. They usually belong to small tribes that came to Algeria centuries ago. Some ethnologists believe they migrated from Asia, others from Egypt. Personally, I was always reminded by them of the gypsies wandering throughout Europe and penetrating eastward even as far as China and Oriental Siberia.

On hearing the woman's cry, my companion started and looked around, interrupting his account of the pirate Jafar, that "hyena of the sea" who had had his lair on the Zaffarin Islands that bear his name. He abruptly stopped talking and sat in silence.

I filled his glass, which he emptied in one gulp and then mumbled :

" I must always meet these *gezzanas* and thus open old wounds."

He lowered his head and remained for a moment absorbed in his thoughts.

" Tell me ; it might relieve you," I suggested to him.

" Will you write of it afterward ? " he suddenly queried.

" That will depend entirely upon your wishes," I replied.

" I can be discreet, and have already once before described the tragic life of a man after he had died, for he had given me permission to do this."

The old man pondered deeply and after a while spoke :

" You may write without waiting for my death . . . Perhaps it might be useful to some one ; it might restrain him from an imprudent and ignoble deed. I will tell you the story of the early years of my life. It was long ago, for I was only twenty then."

Sipping his wine, Monsieur Dufait began in a quiet, trembling voice a second narrative, which I shall again give in his own words without the cumbersome quotation-marks.

## CHAPTER XII

### THE LOVE OF A SAHIRA

I WAS born in Algeria and it was here that I began my independent life. After my father's death I was employed by a firm which was then trading with the native tribes of the Sahara. In those days this was neither an easy nor a safe undertaking. Railways, roads and motor-cars did not exist. I usually took out a caravan of ten camels under the leadership of two reliable guides recommended to me by the local *cadi*. My cargo consisted of fancy goods, household utensils and various small objects, such as needles, cotton, knives, mirrors and coloured pictures, which formed the bulk of my merchandise and were eagerly bought by the nomads and by their women-folk.

Travelling southward, we often visited Tuggurt and Laghwat, leaving goods at different points along the route in exchange for bales of wool, bags of dates, panther- and guepard-skins and "roses of the desert," those strange crystals of carbonate of lime resembling roses that are strewn all over the Sahara. These found a ready market among the tourists and brought me a considerable income. The goods bought from the natives were usually sold in Algiers.

Caravan routes were not so well guarded as they are to-day; the natives refused to acknowledge our rule, ignored our laws and retained their warlike inclinations, constantly attacking caravans or lonely horsemen. On my journeys I was always carefully armed, and my guides were well supplied with powder and bullets for their long rifles.

Between Biskra and Tuggurt I was at first frequently attacked by armed bands, but these attempts were later

abandoned when the nomads discovered how dearly they had to pay for their folly, for I had a keen eye and never wasted my bullets. Ultimately, the sherifs of several tribes came one day to my tent and concluded a friendly treaty which acknowledged me as their *khuan*, or brother. After that date I always travelled in safety and was hospitably received in the villages and encampments of the nomads.

One season I was entrusted with numerous commissions from various firms who were anxious to establish trade relations with all the oases in the Tuggurt district and to secure contracts for future crops of dates and wool. I hired my camels and my guides as usual and started on the journey. We reached Tuggurt without incident, but there my guides informed me that they would not accompany me further and refused at first to give any reason for their action. It was only after much palaver that I was able to extract from them the information that they feared to penetrate further into the desert because the evil djinn, Haul, was reported to be destroying everything and everybody that came within his range. I was young, my dear Sir, and not to be scared by even our own old Beelzebub, let alone by some native Haul! Determined to go on, I finally won over the guides by increasing their fees and set out for the depths of the Sahara. It was July, and the heat was so terrific that even the camels' pads were splitting on the sun-baked sand, and my Arabs had to wear two pairs of slippers to prevent scalds and injuries to their feet. A herd of gazelles which we passed on the way were unable to travel, for their feet were so scorched and burned that they could not move. It was this heat that formed the powerful weapon of the ghastly djinn who was storming and raging in the desert. All the wells were dry and all the plants were burned, so much so that the locusts began to die out or to migrate in swarms southward to the Sudan or north into the Tell. It was, consequently, not

surprising that an epidemic of typhoid fever began to spread among the natives.

We saw the first traces of the disaster in a nomad camp of four or five tents which were pitched upon a hill just outside of Tuggurt, where the story that the presence of jackals and hyenas told was too terrible to repeat. Further along the route we passed the lifeless bodies of camels, sheep and goats, while in the first oasis that we reached fear and despair reigned supreme. Men and animals were dying like flies, and swarms of locusts and other insects were devouring the dates that were just then ripening. We were told by the natives that all the efforts of the sorcerers and witches had proved of no avail and that, according to the saintly Marabouts, the vindictive Haul was raging over the Sahara, sowing everywhere the seeds of disease and death.

I ought to have discontinued my journey then and there, but I was light-hearted and believed so fully in my lucky star that I travelled on, giving no heed to the faces of my guides, that were already clouded with fear and horror.

Near El-Alia two of our camels suddenly dropped to the ground and refused to move. We waited for them until sunset. An hour later the animals suddenly jumped to their feet, but almost immediately sank down again—dead.

“Haul smote them with his whip,” whispered a terrified guide.

We transferred our goods to the remaining camels and went on. Bodies of camels and of domestic animals dotted the sides of the trail; here and there the blackened sand marked recently deserted camps, and the stones set up told of the victims that had been buried there. Jackals came within close range, gazing audaciously at us, and even followed us, showing their teeth in evident expectation of easy prey.

One day I stopped the caravan by a well which was almost dry. That was somewhere south of Ghardaïa—at least I thought it was.



After the evening meal I suddenly felt a strange weakness suffusing my body and a tumult in my brain. Soon, however, I fell asleep. For a while I thought I heard voices, the roar of camels, the footsteps of men and the rush of the wind, but after a short interval everything was still.

When I awakened I immediately saw that the sun was high and noticed that the canvas flap at the entrance to my tent was being lifted by gusts of wind.

"The simoon," I thought, and clapped my hands for the guides.

When no one appeared, I jumped up and rushed outside to find everything shrouded in a dense yellow fog. Only a few yards away from the tent the whirling sand formed a heavy curtain; nor could I see the skies, for over me a yellow chaos roared and howled. On all sides I heard strange voices, harsh sounds and weird noises.

I shouted for the guides, but there was no reply. Searching about for them, I stumbled over a camel's corpse and realized that it must have fallen during the night. Then I came upon my goods stacked in an orderly manner behind the rocks. Nor far away my own camel stood harnessed, with my rifle thrown across the saddle; the guides were nowhere to be seen.

It was then for the first time in my life, but unfortunately not for the last, that terror and almost panic entered and possessed my heart. I had no doubt that the Arabs had deserted me and left me alone there in the desert.

My position was desperate, to say the least. I had to act; but to proceed was unthinkable, for in the yellow fog surrounding me I could not even dream of following the route. I decided it was best to make for Ghardaïa and there to hire some of the gloomy Mzabites to return for my goods and lead the caravan; but, with the simoon raging about me, it was impossible to tell north from south. I gave some water to my camel, tied it to one of the cases and covered the well with canvas in order to keep out the sand.

The storm raged with such ferocity and fury that only then did I realize fully the horror and panic which the simoon inspires in the natives. It was a terrifying experience. The gusts of wind flung clouds of sand into the air, flattened my tent, wrenched and tore the canvas and broke loose large stones, which rolled down the rocks with a crash, adding their thunder to the roar and piercing moans of the merciless storm. How could I blame those superstitious Berbers and Tuaregs, when even I, a sober-minded Frenchman, felt that not one Haul, the king of desert spirits, but thousands of the most vicious, cruel djinns were taking part in this rage and fury that shattered and smashed everything that came within its range !

For two long days and nights the simoon rode the Sahara, driving before him the countless armies of yellow spectres sent out to conquer the green, picturesque oases and to work death and destruction. At last, exhausted by his own fury, he finally subsided, and only then the haze of yellow sand began to disperse and at last disappeared, so that I could see the skies and the horizon.

With only one bag of goods I mounted my camel and started north. As the animal was robust and swift, I was convinced that I would be in Ghardaïa before sunset. However, the sun had already disappeared somewhere beyond the horizon and the scarlet glimmers had faded from the west when I was still wandering about the desert, trying to discover traces of human habitation. I had to spend the night in the wilderness and did not even pitch my tent, for anxiety, fear and foreboding had, by that time, crept into my heart. When I think of it even now, after all these years have elapsed, I feel as if my blood were stopping in my veins.

Six days I wandered through the limitless sands, desperately rushing in different directions in search of an encampment or of traces of some life. During all this time I found no wells and no water, only the dried-up beds of the *wads*,



33. A NEGRESS FROM DUIROT



34. TYPICAL KABYLES



only the black stains of an evaporated pool, covered with a shining surface of salt.

On the third day I had to stop the water-ration of my camel, saving the little that was left for myself. I had taken but a small supply with me, for I had counted on reaching Ghardaïa in one day. Despair, fear and abandon were in my soul when I listened at night to the mournful groans of the camel; and when it ceased its plaintive laments, I started up with a cry of horror on my lips to see if it was still alive, for it was my only hope of salvation.

Finally not a drop of water was left in the leather bag or at the bottom of the wooden keg. I stopped for the night behind some black rocks, broken and scored by the wind and the sand. I did not see a living creature throughout the day, not even a scorpion or a lizard. This was an ill omen and told me there was no water in the vicinity, a fact that was also confirmed by the appearance of the camel, which stood with its head drooped and its horror-laden, yearning eyes fixed on the ground.

I climbed the rocks and searched the horizon. As far as the eye could see there was only the limitless, stony desert, dotted with the remains of mountains that had stood here in days gone by. There were no bushes and not even a blade of grass.

Throughout the day I had been so tormented by thirst that I tore open the bag where only yesterday there had been some water and began to suck the soft, stinking leather. On the morrow, without giving a thought to direction, I started blindly forward. The heat was unbearable. Tramping wearily behind the camel, I noticed that the animal was leaving traces of blood on the sand. I was aghast, for I realized that its pads were splitting and its feet were being cut by the sharp stones which strewn the ground. I had crossed the desert so many times that I was well aware the animal could not endure much longer,



but would soon lie down not to rise again. And what would then happen to me? Despair was gripping my heart, killing my power to think and all my common sense.

"Forward! Forward! Forward at any price, so long as the camel can go!" I prayed to some one unseen and unheard.

Suddenly I cried out with joy, fell down on my knees and eagerly kissed the sun-baked earth, offering thanks to God who takes human beings under His care, for before me I saw a wide, glistening lake with green palms and the white walls of buildings around it. I jumped on the camel and, shouting and urging the animal forward, rushed to the—*fata Morgana*!

I wandered for another three days, dragged and tempted hither and thither by the treacherous desert, until I ceased to believe in the existence of men and of their shelters on earth. If at that time I had seen Biskra itself with its buildings and minarets, I would not have driven my camel toward it. I should have taken it for a vision, another *fata Morgana*, a temptation of the merciless desert!

I do not know how long I remained in that forlorn land, forsaken by man and beast. I only know that I lost all sense of day and night, that I ceased to suffer the torments of hunger and thirst, until one day the whole horizon, the sky, the earth, the camel's head, my saddle and everything appeared to me besmeared in blood. I swooned, and with the last effort of my sinking brain I realized that I was falling.

It was only when I felt a stream of water being poured down my throat that I regained consciousness. I wanted to move, but could not; I wanted to scream, but had not sufficient strength. A great, horrifying weakness drugged my body. Unknown faces and figures, white garments and the flames of a fire swam before my eyes and disappeared in the sombreness which enveloped and oppressed me.

I awoke again and began to look about. I was lying in

a tent. A fire was burning merrily, and near it a woman sat huddled with her back toward me. A large wooden vessel, which I could see contained food, and a brass jug filled with water stood by the fire. The woman wore a long blue *abaiyia*, over which fell two black braids adorned with gaudy ribbons. As she also wore large silver ear-rings, I concluded that she was a nomad from the depths of the Sahara.

I sighed deeply, and the woman turned, revealing to me an old, withered face. Her large eyes and strong white teeth glistened in the darkness, as she rose and bent over me with a bowl of some liquid, which I drank eagerly. New strength seemed to have entered my body.

"Where am I?" I asked.

"In the *duar* of the Beni Sehail," she replied. "You were found unconscious in the desert and brought here by our men. For three days you fought with death, but Allah is merciful, and you will recover soon."

Indeed, I did grow stronger and stronger every day, and was soon able to rise from my bed and go outside the tent, where I would sit and gaze across the immense stretches of desert before me. A stream that murmured near some rocks was the only sign of life or existence. A few palms, some bushes and grass surrounded the tent. It was a small oasis, an island in the ocean of the barren desert. Some three hundred yards away the thin stream of water disappeared without a trace among the stones and sand. A herd of sheep and goats grazed near by. I noticed other tents, but there was not one man in the camp; I saw only women and children, and once a paralysed old man. The women of this encampment spoke a strange dialect and understood Arabic with difficulty. Never had I heard of the existence of this tribe. From my conversations with the women I learned that there were several other encampments in the vicinity, and that the epidemic was still ravaging the population and had already destroyed all their live stock.

"Why are there no men to be seen here?" I asked the nomad woman.

"They have all gone to consult the Marabout, Sidi Smail ben Sherif, and ask his advice as to what should be done."

After I recovered my strength, I pitched my own tent and settled down in it to relieve my rescuers. As the nomad women were very kindly disposed toward me, I was often invited by the old woman to various meals, usually consisting of the traditional *kouskous* and of tea with mint. Round the common vessel, from which my portion was taken and placed on a separate plate, there were usually three of them, the old mother and her two daughters of twelve and thirteen years respectively, as bold and merry as kittens. These daughters of the desert mature early, knowing instinctively that destiny grants them but a few years of joy and delight. Each of them feels that for her there will be no lasting golden sunset and dusk, but that, after the radiant, happy day, there will suddenly come down the sombre night, a night of long agony to be spent in hopeless abandon and gloomy yearnings.

In the tent there was, however, one mystery which I could not unravel. I noticed one day after the evening meal that the old Arab woman lifted a curtain at the far end of the tent and passed beneath it a tray of food and drink.

"Who is hidden there?" I asked, pointing to the curtain.

The old woman only placed her finger on her lips and shook her head deprecatingly. I gave presents to the girls of sweets and various gaudy rags, which I extricated from my bag, and began to question them very cautiously and discreetly, but these clever little animals of the desert only laughingly ran away from me without telling me anything.

Another week passed, and still the men of the *duar* did not return.

The mysterious curtain continued so to excite my curiosity

that one day, when I was left alone in the tent, I went up to it and swiftly drew it aside. I was struck by what I saw, for there was a young girl sitting on a pile of soft cushions, so motionless that at first I took her to be a statue. She wore gaudy holiday garments. Her red, black and yellow striped dress was hung with jewels and was heavy with silver and gold embroidery. On her head glistened a diadem, similar to the ones worn by the dancers of the Uled Nail but adorned with black and white ostrich feathers. From the diadem thin chains fell to her neck and breast, almost entirely covering her face. Through them one could just see her painted cheeks, her pencilled eyebrows and her eyes shaded with *hedta*. On her almost motionless breast hung large necklaces of silver coins, metal plaques and a large amulet representing a snake. In addition to these, various talismans and amulets were tied to a cord of human hair, most of them little leather bags with quotations from the Koran painted or burned upon them.

The woman was gazing vacantly in front of her, her arms pressed tightly to her sides, while her painted hands rested on her knees. In the corner stood a little brazier containing coals, over which a cloud of fragrant smoke was floating. As she sat there, this girl reminded me of the images of various goddesses which I had seen in museums. I dropped the curtain and left the tent, bewildered and seeking some solution of the mystery of this woman with her chain-veil.

On the same evening the men returned to the village. They greeted me very courteously and told me in detail how they had found me half-dead by the corpse of my camel, brought me to their camp and left me under the care of old Fatima. I gave them all small presents from my limited bag, and then attempted to open negotiations for the hire of camels and the recovery of the merchandise I had left at my last camp in the desert. They refused point-blank.

"We have no camels to hire, for almost all of them have



died. The few that remain we must keep, lest the revenge of Haul should come upon us here in the desert. The Sidi has told us to wait patiently until the holy men have conquered the evil spirit and made the desert safe again. This should take place very soon."

They pronounced these last words in a very mysterious manner, at the same time casting significant glances at me. I had no alternative but to wait.

Another week passed. Then one morning I noticed a great commotion in the village. The men were pitching a tent for a newcomer, a man clad in a clean white burnous, with his face veiled in a white cloth that was supposed to guard him from evil spirits. I learned that he was a very important Marabout, the leader of all the religious sects of the nomads.

Apparently a council was then held in the tent. Its deliberations were not concluded that day, for the Marabout remained in the *duar* and a feast, attended by the men of the camp, was given in his honour. After the feast the council was resumed and lasted until very late at night.

Throughout the next day I heard the excited voices of the men on all sides. The sounds of loud protests and of quarrels reached me in my tent, but these were always dominated by the deep, even voice of the Marabout. Evidently it was impossible to arrive at an agreement.

As I have told you before, my tent was pitched next to the one in which I opened my eyes after being brought in from the desert. I could always hear clearly any ordinary conversations that took place there. I was keeping to myself, anxious not to be in the way of the men while they were trying to settle their own affairs, when suddenly I heard some of them coming toward my tent. However, they entered the next one, where the mysterious woman was concealed. I listened, but, as the voices were very low, I could only catch separate, disjointed words and could not understand anything.



The nomads remained in the tent for a long time. Occasionally the conversation ceased, and then I could hear the low sounds of a drum or a tambourine. Following these there were usually whisperings and raised voices. At last there fell a deep silence, broken finally by the clear tones of the Marabout :

“ Zeineb, thou beloved of Allah ! Thou art more powerful than all *kahinas* ; thou art a *sahira* (oracle) possessing the wisdom and power of Sidjah,<sup>1</sup> the science of Tanguit, the sight of Debu ;<sup>2</sup> thou, the most beautiful woman of all tribes, hast heard our thoughts ; tell us what we must do ! ”

Then came the clatter of a drum, followed by absolute silence, in which I heard nothing but the beating of my own heart.

At last there sounded a low, droning voice, as though some one were talking in his sleep :

“ A *haddad* (blacksmith) behind the southern rocks. . . . He has cast the *rbat* (great curse) . . . he has tied and untied the knot of happiness and misfortune, of gaiety and tears, of life and death. . . . I see black shadows, like byways of the night, leading into his tent. . . . It is there that our men perished. Who knows where their bones lie ? . . . Their mothers and fathers will never bury them. The *haddad* . . . *haddad* ! . . . Stone him, stone him ! . . . Let a pile of stones grow over his body . . . and let his grave become a *kubba mensi* (deserted grave), and let the spiteful djinns frighten the Faithful away from it ! . . . ”

The drum clattered again, then everything was silent. The assembly was dispersing, talking in muffled whispers.

“ Three nights must pass, then another three ; and then . . . ” the deep voice of the Marabout sounded clearly.

“ Thou hast spoken, sherif,” responded the nomads,

<sup>1</sup> One of the militant witches who fought the false prophet, Mosa Ilama.

<sup>2</sup> Tanguit and Debu, famous witches of the Ghomarra tribe.

moving away ; while the women returned to the tent, where I could hear their cries of joy, accompanied by the clapping of hands and the noise of pots and pans.

After a while the old Arab woman came to my tent and invited me to the evening meal. Four women sat around the bowls of food, three of whom I knew, while the fourth I thought I had never seen before. However, as I looked at her intently and our eyes met, I recognized the heavy, motionless gaze and the statue-like features of the woman from behind the curtain, Zeineb, the *kahina* and *sahira* whose counsel had been sought by the Marabout and the nomads.

She looked at me with her steady, penetrating eyes and then, addressing no one in particular, said in her toneless voice :

“ Woe to him who shall attempt to pass the two *wads* and the black rocks in the south ! . . . He will not return the same.”

She did not look at me again. We consumed our *kouskous* and oatmeal cakes in silence. Even the girls, who usually chattered so gaily, were silent and sent out furtive glances from the corners of their eyes.

I met Zeineb on three subsequent occasions, on each of which she appeared more lively and gay. She busied herself in the tent, went out to the herd or played with her sisters.

One day, as I sat in front of my tent, I watched her as she walked along with a water-jug on her shoulder. She did not notice me and soon disappeared behind their tent, from where I heard the voice of the old Arab woman saying :

“ We have not long to wait.”

“ Another three days, and I shall have had my revenge over that pagan witch, the cursed daughter of a blacksmith ! She stole the sun of my life, the beautiful Ismail ben Jurat. Where is he now ? His horse came back, but he is not here ! The sword of a warrior hangs in his tent, but where is the warrior ? Revenge ! . . . Revenge ! . . .”

The usually expressionless voice of Zeineb became harsh and passionate.

"The daughter of a black snake! Blacksmith's blood!"

Here the conversation ceased, as some one came in from the pasture.

I felt it was impossible to wait until this crowd of ignorant nomads should stone some wretched blacksmith just to satisfy the revenge of Zeineb. It would be a crime on my part, and everything in me revolted at the thought; so I decided to act. The southern rocks could not be far if the nomads intended to go there without camels. Taking my rifle with me, I started on my errand long before the dawn.

As I made my way to the south, I crossed two dried-up river-beds which came together into a single one that was filled with stones right up to its very edges. Some three kilometres away there rose a long black rock, split into great sections, as though it had been purposely divided by human hands. When I reached it, I found on the other side of it two black- and yellow-striped tents. Some goats were grazing on the sparse, half-dried grass that grew around a small pool.

Advancing toward the tents, I called out the usual *salaam*. An old Arab, clad in a long, coarse-woven shirt and bare-footed, emerged from one of the shelters. He returned my greeting and gazed at me suspiciously and in silence.

"I am a stranger to you, *mumen*," I began. "I am an *abi od khuan* (white brother) of the tribes of the Ziban, Uled Nail, Beni Ismail and all those that graze herds and gather dates from the Amur mountains to the Zab."

"I have not heard of you, Sidi," he replied, closely watching my movements. "It is far from here to those mountains."

"I come to you as a friend," I continued; "I want to warn you, to give you counsel. But first of all tell me whence you have come and why you are alone here?"

"I am not alone. In my tent dwell my wife, Daura, and my two daughters, Selhim and Char."

"But what are you doing here?" I repeated.

The Arab hesitated, but after a moment's thought answered:

"As a boy I came here with the tents of my father from the Kufrah oasis, and we settled here among the tribe of Beni Sehail. With them we wandered across the desert, eating the same bread and living with them through good times and bad. I was despised, though tolerated, in the *duar*—despised because I was the son of my father, a blacksmith; tolerated because I was useful at my trade. Later, when my daughter Selhim placed a veil over her face,<sup>1</sup> I was even respected . . . because of my daughter. With the milk of her mother Selhim had received the gift of sorcery and of interpreting dreams. Crowds of men from distant oases and camps flocked to us for advice and prophecies. A year later the Marabout announced that Zeineb, the daughter of Yusuf Abdullah, was also a *kahina* and a *sahira*. This was a lie, for Zeineb speaks as a sorceress only when her senses are numbed by the fumes of *khaulan*, while my daughter derives her powers from a crystal that once belonged to a goddess. Zeineb was betrothed to Ismail, who came here from far away and took part in our *ahals*. Selhim never attended these gatherings, but, passing one day by the place where they danced, she saw Ismail. He saw her too, and Ismail ben Jurat, the betrothed of Zeineb, gave his heart to my daughter, who did not, however, love him and refused his attentions. The youth offered for her five times a hundred sheep and fifty camels, but nothing would persuade her. Piqued by her refusal, he left the *duar* and never returned, whereupon Zeineb, mad with anger and despair, accused my girl of having murdered Ismail with the aid of the djinns. Since then we have always been insulted; people have spat at us and regarded

<sup>1</sup> A sign of maturity.

us as impure ; and one day some infuriated women attacked Selhim, scratched her face and wanted to stone her. It was then that I decided to return to Kufrah. We left the *duar*, but the evil spirits killed all our camels but one, so that now we must wait until the heat abates, for otherwise the camel would not go far and then we should all perish—I and my wife and my daughters, Selhim and Char.”

“ It sounds bad,” I thought. “ If they cannot escape, they will surely perish. What can I do ? ”

As I was pondering, the blacksmith invited me into his tent, where I met his wife, a tall, slim woman with strong and noble features, such as I had never before seen in Africa. The aquiline nose and the thin, proud lips spoke of an unknown origin, far different from that of the ordinary tribeswoman.

She greeted me with a dignified *salaam* and began to busy herself preparing tea, aided by her daughter Char, a deaf and lame girl with pock-marked cheeks and thick, negro lips.

While we were sipping our tea, a girl of a very different type, young and beautiful, appeared before the tent. It was Selhim.

I rose, amazed and attracted by her appearance. She was of small figure and as clean in line as the Greek statuettes that are being discovered among Roman and Byzantine ruins. Her whole appearance formed a harmony of line, movement and colour. Her fair hair seemed almost golden under the rays of the sun. So beautiful, so unusual and so wonderful, she stood there in front of the tent—and fixed her eyes upon me.

Suddenly she rushed inside, ran toward me and looked intently into my eyes.

“ Death . . . death ! ” . . . she whispered, trembling.

I motioned to the Arab, and we left the tent.

“ Your daughter, *mumen*, has spoken the truth. I came here to warn you.”



Then I told him everything that I had seen and heard in the *duar*. He showed neither surprise nor fear.

"I know what they think over there," he whispered. "Selhim had a dream."

"You must plan your escape, for you have still two days and can go a long way in that time," I counselled him.

"I shall not move from this spot; my daughter Selhim will save me," replied the Arab.

"Nothing will help you when all the men of the *duar* come here," I exclaimed.

"Selhim will save us . . ."

"I have warned you, my friend," I retorted, almost in anger. "I can give you no other help, for I am powerless myself. Do as you wish; I am going. Farewell!"

"Farewell, Sidi, and may Allah bless you for your good intentions toward us."

I had turned and started in the direction of the rocks, when suddenly I heard a woman's voice behind me:

"Sidi, I beseech you, wait."

I stopped and saw Selhim running toward me. She caught hold of my arm and led me back to the tent.

"Begone!" she ordered her family, as we entered. Without a murmur they all left.

"Sit down, watch and listen!" she exclaimed, as she handed me a large leather cushion.

Then she herself sat down beside me on the worn carpet and placed a round, closely plaited basket in front of her. Unbuttoning her outer garment, she let it fall from her arms and neck and began to hum a plaintive melody, at the same time waving her arms, adorned with jingling bracelets.

She concluded her song with a long-drawn-out note, similar to those which you can often hear in the howls of the simoon, picked up the tambourine and, beating it in a peculiar rhythm, cried in a hollow voice:

"Tanit Ashtoreth! Tanit Ashtoreth!"

The rag over the basket moved and uncovered the head of a snake, which blinked its yellow lids, and, darting out its long, sharp tongue, slipped out of the basket. I did not know what kind of snake it was, and only remember that it was long and fat, with stripes and spots on its black back and a silver strap, or collar, around its neck.

The reptile lifted itself high in the air and, shaking its head, moved toward the girl, who looked into its glowing, threatening eyes.

"Tanit . . . Tanit Ashtoreth," she repeated in a low whisper.

The reptile was already reaching up to her breast and, coiling its form on her bosom, it caressed her with its head, touched her with a rapid movement of its tongue and gave forth sharp, hissing sounds.

"Ashtoreth . . . Ash-to-reth . . ." I could hear clearly whispered above the hissing of the snake.

The woman then produced a large crystal ball from her basket and raised it over the reptile's head. The sun, penetrating into the tent with a cascade of its rays, glimmered in the crystal like myriads of multicoloured flames. The snake gazed at the luminous point as if charmed, dropping its head lower and lower. At last it lay in Selhim's lap, extended and stiff like the long, thick root of a fig-tree.

The woman stared into the glistening, shining ball, while her eyes became even wider and wider, bespeaking fear and horror.

"Death . . . death . . ." she whispered. "There is no salvation. A heap of stones towers over my father's body. In the desert my mother and sister lie lifeless. . . . The tracks of my feet cross the sands. I am deprived of the gift of the goddess Tanit. . . . There is no snake, no fire of the goddess. . . . A long, difficult path before me and behind me . . . gloomy rocks and death . . . in despair and in

yearning. I see you in chains . . . on the edge of an abyss . . . Woe, woe ! ”

The snake started up violently and began to hiss.

“ Snake, thou chosen of the goddess and vessel of her wisdom,” Selhim suddenly exclaimed in a piercing voice, bending over the reptile and folding her hands as if in prayer. “ Help us ! Save us ! ”

The snake slowly rose higher and higher. Like a broad ribbon it encircled her breasts and slipped on to her shoulders. In a moment it had folded itself round her neck and, lifting its head to her ear, hissed and ran out its long, pointed tongue.

Fear was gradually disappearing from the woman’s face. She sat motionless, absorbed in thought and rapidly turning the crystal ball in her hands. A moment later she uncoiled the snake from around her neck and replaced it in the basket together with the crystal.

“ You will stay here until the arrival of the murderers,” she ordered me in a firm, commanding voice.

It is unbelievable, but I stayed. For two days I did not see either Selhim or her father. They had disappeared. The old woman moved noiselessly about the tent, her features gloomy and absorbed in thought. The deaf Char betrayed no anxiety or emotion, but busied herself with her household duties and with the sheep, ever mumbling to herself as was her habit.

On the third day, an hour after sunrise, I saw a crowd advancing toward the tent from the direction of the black rocks, with the Marabout striding proudly at their head. Over the crowd fluttered a black flag bearing a verse from the Koran and some magic signs. Discovering me, the nomads halted and just looked at me with amazement.

“ Let the foreigner return to the *duar*,” said the Marabout. “ We have our own affairs to settle here.”

“ I was hunting,” I replied, “ and bruised my leg badly, and I shall have to stay here until to-morrow.”

After what was an awkward silence the newcomers whispered something among themselves and advanced to the tent without taking the slightest notice of me. Some one shouted :

“ Haddad Megris, come out ! ”

The blacksmith's wife appeared at the entrance of the tent, calm and aloof, but with something in her keen eyes that forced the crowd to step back.

“ Woman, where is your husband, Haddad Megris ? ” they finally shouted at her.

“ Five days ago my husband and master left this camp for ever in search of new pastures, where the merciless Haul has no power over man or beast. Our daughter, the wise *sahira*, is leading him. They will come and fetch us, when our tents have been pitched in the place chosen by our daughter.”

“ You lie like a rabid dog ! ” the crowd howled menacingly.

The woman drew herself up proudly and in a clear, even voice said :

“ You will not find them, for they have become invisible ; they are surrounded by the magic circle, *dairat el-ihata* ! Even now I see my husband among you. By his side hangs a *kumia* ; his eyes are glowing with wrath. I also see my daughter, Selhim, who has inherited the mysterious science and power, the wisdom that has resided in our tribe since the days of the great goddess. In her hand she holds a sacrificial knife with which she cuts the throats of animals and of swallows to prepare the powerful talisman, *khankatiriya*. Invisible and inaudible, she could draw your blood in honour of the great goddess. Fear not, however, *mumeni* ! I know what you have decided. You wish to stone my husband and master, your former neighbour, a peaceful, innocent man. The djinns of madness have seized you, and you have been cheated and thwarted by their servant, a revengeful woman, who is as blind as an owl on a clear sunny day.”

The crowd roared and surged forward, but the woman raised her hand and brought quiet upon them again.

"You are as blind as moles and as spiteful as hungry hyenas. Hatred has thrown a black pall over your minds. While Haul rages and storms, men and beasts perish. The whole Sahara is becoming a vast graveyard; no one buries the dead, no one skins the fallen animals. The desert is silent; unheard are the songs of our horsemen; only the jackals and hyenas are howling for their feast. Do you not see that Haul has touched you with his revengeful hand? He has taken our son, who was the light of our life, killed our camels and destroyed our herds. If it were true that our Selhim had cast the curse of Haul on men, would he persecute us too? Consider it, *mumeni*, think!"

"This woman talks sense!" shouted a voice in the crowd, but it was soon drowned in the howls and threats of the other nomads.

"*Mumeni!*" cried Daura. "Sahira Selhim sees far and deep. She knows the cause of Haul's anger. He is the oldest djinn, and the goddess Tanit was his mistress. He remembers that men of old offered to him sacrifices of blood and he demands them now. Listen to me, *mumeni!* Come here in three days, and I shall show you the heart and the eyes of a man whom the *sahira* will offer as sacrifice to Haul. Only then will he return to his underground kingdom. If the calamity continues, you can carry out your plans."

At that moment, by a strange coincidence, a large stone broke away from the top of the rock and rolled down with a terrific crash.

"Do you see?" cried the woman in a shrill voice. "The sign of Haul!"

After a momentary hesitation the crowd, frightened and confused, began to retreat, making various magic protective signs until it had disappeared from view.

We were alone during the rest of the day. After sunset





35. THE HOPE OF KABYLIA



36: THE MARABOUT OF THE KABYLES

the old woman prepared the usual meal and, having placed the food before me, motioned me to sit down and eat. Following the meal a strange weakness came over me, and I soon fell into a heavy sleep. When I awoke, my head and the whole of my body were aching. I wanted to rise, but could not. To my surprise and horror I discovered that I was bound with leather thongs. I called out, but no one appeared. It was not until sunrise that the flaps of the tent were suddenly drawn apart and Selhim stood out against the background of the clear sky. She stepped in, looked round cautiously, and, discovering me, clapped her hands with joy. In a second she was at my side, freeing me from my bonds.

“ I was poisoned and tied. Who did this ? ”

She was silent.

“ Speak,” I insisted.

“ It was my mother ! ” she faltered. “ She thought you would be the sacrifice for the goddess Tanit. But no, no ! ”

Selhim placed her hands on my shoulders and looked into my eyes from so near that I could feel her warm breath and catch the fragrance of her hair.

“ *Aziz* (beloved),” she whispered, “ you must not leave this tent until to-morrow.”

You will realize that I was terribly indignant at being deprived of my liberty. I bitterly reproached the old woman, when she returned ; and when the host arrived, I tongue-lashed him and wanted to give him a good hiding. But they both apologized, going down on their knees and kissing my garments. Only Selhim smiled mysteriously and took no part in the whole incident.

Throughout the day I was fed sumptuously, just as if I were, in fact, to become the sacrificial animal, that scapegoat so beloved by the gods and goddesses. Selhim busied herself in the tent, making herself beautiful and tidying things up generally and producing for the purpose various

rugs and carpets which she hung all over the walls. Before sunset she came to me and whispered :

" I am like a *deba*,<sup>1</sup> and you shall be possessed by *deba*."

I was young and eager for adventure, so I stayed.

After the evening meal Selhim turned to her family and said :

" Leave the tent until sunrise, for my hour has come. The goddess Tanit wills it that I should attain happiness this one night, the first and the last, so that I should have a moment of love and pass through life with the memory of it. Such is the old custom of the priestesses of Tanit."

You see that my hair is grey now, that my face is wrinkled and that my eyes have lost their fire. I am old, very old, worn out by life ; but even now I shiver at the thought of that night that passed like one imperceptible moment.

On the morrow, even before the dawn, Selhim led me to the rocks and, pressing her whole body to mine and covering my face and eyes with kisses, whispered :

" May the merciful goddess spread her mantle over you like a tent and guard you all your life. You are the first to whom I have given myself body and soul—I, a *sahira* ; and you are the last that will ever be in my heart, so long as I live. Our roads are like the paths of the stars which lead in different directions and, even though they run side by side, can never meet. *Tanit baraket* (may Tanit bless you) ! "

When she had finished speaking, she pushed me gently toward the rocks and ran back to the tent.

On returning to the *duar*, I found there a caravan of traders who were proceeding to Tuggurt and decided to go with them. On the third day we reached the oasis, where I hired some camels and searched out the goods I had abandoned in the desert. I was not loath that my

<sup>1</sup> Hyena. According to the natives this animal has the magic power of exciting love and affection. Passionate love is referred to as *deba* by the nomads of the Sahara.

road took me to the *duar*, where such an extraordinary adventure had come my way. Leaving my men in the village, I mounted a camel and rode to the black rocks. There were traces of a camp there, but no tents were to be seen. When I searched all about the place, I noticed on the north side of the rocks a heap of stones which had evidently been recently placed there, for the lizards had had no time to establish their quarters among them. Grim thoughts rushed through my mind. On my return to the *duar* I got hold of the *cadi*, took him aside and asked in a stern voice :

“ What have you done to the *haddad* ? ”

At first the *cadi* lowered his head and did not say a word, but at last I succeeded in extracting a confession from him. It appeared that after the three days appointed by the blacksmith's wife had elapsed without any cessation of the epidemic in the *duar*, an attack was made. The women managed to escape, but the blacksmith was caught and stoned.

“ Since then the epidemic has abated, so we must have been right in our judgment,” explained the nomad.

Afterward I was told by some French officials that an investigation had been made and even a trial of the principal actors had taken place, but I never was able to gather any news of the blacksmith's family.

Meanwhile my thoughts returned to Selhim, and in my dreams I saw her hastening back to the lonely tent where I spent the night of *deba*. There was a strange feeling in my heart which I had not known before. I looked at other women with an indifferent eye ; none of them attracted me. A desperate yearning tormented me. On many occasions during my journeys across the Sahara I visited the place where the blacksmith's tent had stood, asking everyone whom I met on the way about Selhim, the *sahira* ; but she had disappeared like a stone cast into the sea. In spite of this, I was convinced that she was alive, for often



in my subconscious mind I felt her close to me and some times saw her like a swift, imperceptible shadow, looking at me with her flaming eyes, stretching her arms toward me and whispering :

" You are the first and the last . . . "

As the representative of my firm I had to remain for a considerable time in Biskra, where at that period there were no French families at all, so that my acquaintances were entirely among the native elders and wealthy Berbers of the oasis.

A year had already elapsed since I had nearly perished in the desert. The epidemics had long since ceased, the date-crops were excellent and the people of the oases and camps were rapidly recovering from the disaster.

One day I was invited by an Arab to a hunting-party. Though I have never been an enthusiastic huntsman, I accepted the invitation, for it gave an opportunity of seeing gazelle-hunting with Nubian greyhounds and vultures, which is now very rare in Algeria. Starting early in the morning, we marked down a herd on the plain beyond the Zab mountains. We rode full speed toward the animals, and, when the gazelles took to flight, bounding over stones and bushes, we unleashed the hounds. Our horses, trained in this kind of hunting, galloped on over stones and ditches, raising clouds of dust and sand. At last, after a long pursuit, the hounds overtook a young gazelle and brought it down. A native servant, following close on the heels of the dogs, jumped from his horse and finished off the quarry.

Meanwhile we rushed on, seeing the herd disappearing in the distance. All this time the Arab was carrying a trained vulture on his wrist, and now, unhooding the bird, threw it into the air. Once the vulture was well aloft, he sighted the herd and was soon above it, folded his wings and dropped like a stone upon the leader's head, attacking him with claws and beak until the dogs could come up.

After a very successful hunt, the Arab suggested that

we should repair to a neighbouring settlement, where we could have a meal with his friend, the local *cadi*. We were very hospitably received, and were sitting before the house in the shade of a high wall with the crowns of palm-trees looking over it, when suddenly we heard singing and the beating of drums and tambourines.

A group of beggars were coming down the street. Stopping in front of us, they begged for alms and invoked all the blessings of Allah and of His saints. When we had thrown our coins into a little bowl and the beggars were about to go, there suddenly stepped out from the group a woman in ragged clothes, who caught my arm and asked :

“Does not the Sidi remember the black rocks and the tent of Selhim, the *sahira*? It is Tanit’s wish that we should meet again. . . . I am now an orphan and a wretched woman.”

“What are you doing here, Selhim?” I asked in amazement.

“I am a *gezzana* (sorceress). After my father was murdered by the Beni Sehail and my mother and sister died in the desert, I wandered about a long time, destitute and deserted. I had lost everything—my family, my snake and the fire of the goddess. Tanit had turned away from me. . . . I became a sorceress and am now trying to earn my living with these beggars and vagabonds.”

It was a short, sad story. I made a mistake then, a great mistake. I should have done the same as any other man in my position would have done—given her a few francs and good wishes for the future. . . . But I acted differently—or perhaps it was not in me to act otherwise. All the memories of the scorching night in the fragrant tent close to the black rocks awakened in me.

I took the girl by the hand and announced that she was going with me. My Arab friend smiled mockingly, but Selhim did not notice this and bent down to my knees, whispering :

"*Ashtoreth baraket ! Tanit baraket !*"

In the evening Selhim was already at my house in Biskra. She did not enter at once, but asked permission to go into the town for a while. When she returned she brought with her a small brazier containing live coals, over which she threw some incense, constantly whispering adjurations. In the corner of my dining-room she placed a bowl of yeast to secure prosperity and harmony. Having completed these ceremonies, Selhim fell at my feet and whispered, as she had at the black rock :

" You were the first and the last."

I raised her from the floor, and only then did she lift her veil. I thought she was even more beautiful and attractive, in spite of her rags, her dishevelled hair and the traces which her hard journeys and difficult experiences had left on her inspired and joyful face.

A native woman-servant was told to buy some new clothes for the *sahira* and to assist her in her toilet. Meanwhile I went to town to purchase some jewelry, silks and sweets.

Under the busy hands of the woman everything changed in my little house, everything became clean and tidy. Unconsciously I adopted the same systematic order in my own life. My things were always in order and my meals well cooked and regular.

Selhim flitted round the house like a shadow ; often I was even unaware of her presence, her steps were so quiet. She never worried me and even sought to escape my notice. She was quiet, silent and observant. For some time she lived with the old Berber woman-servant, who had the greatest respect and admiration for the *sahira* and would not call her anything but *lalla*.

Not infrequently I noticed strange women stealing out of my house. They came to consult Selhim and secure the benefit of her talismans and her prophecies. One day I said laughingly to her :

"You are a sorceress, which is, of course, your own affair ; but I am afraid that now I too shall be regarded as a *kahin* ! "

Selhim sighed and drooped her head sadly.

"I have no serpent, no fire of the goddess, no power of a true *sahira*," she murmured.

I made up my mind to do what I could to console this simple woman of the desert and went out in search of a crystal ball. In a stationery shop I found a large paper-weight, made of a slab of black marble with a crystal ball upon it. I bought it and gave it to Selhim. She spent day after day in the yard gazing into the crystal. When I returned home one day, I found my gift on the table in the dining-room.

"You do not want your plaything any longer ? " I asked her.

"Master ! " she replied in a low whisper. "This is an ordinary crystal. It is blind and gives me no voices of those that rule the future."

"Was your crystal different ? "

"Oh yes, Master. It came from the statue of Tanit which once stood in the ancient temple," she exclaimed eagerly.

"Well, in that case I fear I shall not be able to help you, Selhim."

"I know it, and without that crystal I cannot regain my powers. Every day proves this to me ! I can tell fortunes, but I have lost my former authority over the hearts and souls of human beings."

"Would you like to have that power back ? " I continued, anxious to understand something of the psychology of this woman.

"I desire to rule over the heart of a man," she answered, suddenly becoming pale.

"What man ? "

"I was thinking of you, Sidi," was the unhesitating reply.

"Why should you desire my heart and my soul?"

"Were it not for them, I should have perished in the desert like my mother and my sister, or I should have been buried alive under a heap of stones like my father."

"I do not follow."

"From the flames in Tanit's crystal I knew that I should see you again, that this would bring me great happiness and that my death would come from your hand, Sidi. Buoyed by this hope, I have lived and have survived everything."

"And now—what?" I queried, looking at her face, blanched by a deathly pallor.

"Now you do not even notice me, although I am more beautiful than I was there in the tent."

I did not say anything, and Selhim went out of the room.

I hardly knew what to do. The primitive beauty and passion dominating the eyes and blood of that daughter of the desert, of the sorceress, of my slave, irresistibly attracted me.

I could not put out of my mind the madness of that night at the foot of the black rock. I knew that I could now have Selhim as my slave for one word, even a command; but for that very reason I would not take advantage of her position. Her declaration of love had changed the trend of my thoughts. Still I hesitated, and at last decided to leave everything to the mercy of fate and chance.

Gradually I began to take more notice of the girl. The light-hearted meetings of Frenchmen and Spaniards, who were, like myself, homeless and forgotten in the desert, ceased to interest me. I spent my free days and evenings at home. In the daytime I was very busy visiting the market, where I concluded agreements with the natives, signed contracts for wool, hides, cattle and dates, received orders for French goods and inspected the various works which were under my charge. I superintended the construction of the first hotel in Biskra, distributing the materials



and paying the workmen, and visited the neighbouring oases on behalf of my firm. In the evenings I called Selhim to my room, where I taught her French and spoke to her of other countries and of peoples unknown to her. She was very intelligent and had an amazing memory, understanding immediately everything I told her and holding it all without apparent effort.

However, I soon had to interrupt these lessons, for I had received instructions to accept and execute a large army order for sheep which necessitated my going to Tuggurt.

As I bade farewell to Selhim I saw tears in her eyes. When I was seated on my camel, she hung about my neck a talisman and asked me not to remove it, as it would always guard me from misfortune and secure success for me in my undertakings.

While passing the Sidi Okba oasis, I suddenly felt an irresistible desire to see what was in the little bag given me by Selhim, what magic spices or powders had been placed by my *sahira* in the talisman.

I cut the leather and found in the little bag a lock of Selhim's hair, a bit of ribbon which she had worn on her neck and one of a pair of ear-rings I had given her on which ill-formed letters spelled out the word *deba*. I recalled her words in the blacksmith's tent :

"I am like a *deba*, and you shall be possessed by *deba*."

"Passionate love!" A new declaration. Could it be possible that the *sahira* divined that I would open her talisman and look inside it? But all this taken together, the hair, the ear-ring and such an expressive word scribbled in French letters, was so womanlike, so touching!

On my return I was amazed to find that my pupil remembered not only what I had taught her before but had made considerable progress during my absence. She was able to speak enough French so that she often replied in my native tongue to various questions which I put to her

in Arabic. Her Latin script was neater, and she could even write a phrase or two in French.

I soon learned that during my absence she had made the acquaintance of a Berber woman who could speak French, and that she had spent day after day in the woman's house, paying for her lessons with fortune-telling and talismans.

Soon, however, I discovered that French lessons had not occupied all of Selhim's time while I was away in Tuggurt, a fact which was revealed to me one Sunday when I was enjoying a good rest at home after a very strenuous week.

Looking through the window I noticed a native walking up and down on the opposite side of the street. I had never seen the man before, but he apparently took great interest in my house, for he frequently looked up at my windows. As usual I summoned Selhim for her daily lesson, but to my surprise she blushinglly excused herself, saying that she would rather come back in an hour's time.

I returned to the window with my paper. After a while I noticed Selhim go out of the house. Almost immediately the mysterious Arab appeared at her side, and in a moment they were out of sight around the corner of the street. This incident evoked a feeling of jealousy in me.

"Who was that Arab you met outside the house?" I asked Selhim when she returned to my room, book in hand.

Obviously embarrassed, she blushed and replied after a long silence :

"A friend . . . I met him at the house of Aïra bent Alem, where I studied French during your absence, Sidi."

I wanted to ask her more about the man, but refrained from discussing the subject any further.

An incident took place which compelled me to change my attitude towards Selhim. In December the chief of my firm arrived in Biskra and put up at my house. On seeing Selhim he was at once struck with her beauty and charm and made very tactless remarks, calling her

"Madame Dufait." Later, when I explained to him that she was only an orphan of whom I was taking care, he began at once to make advances to her.

I do not know what had taken place between the two one evening, when the chief rushed into my room and began to swear and curse madly.

"Wild beast! She has sharp nails, that venomous little cat!"

Though I naturally guessed that these compliments referred to Selhim, I asked the chief what was the cause of his fury. As he would not admit anything, I later questioned the girl; but she only laughed and would not say anything either.

This adventure of my chief was not to my liking, even though the long scar across his face and neck was sufficient proof that he had not been the victor. I wanted to give him a good hiding and turn him out of my house, but I restrained my impulse and settled the matter in a different way by deciding to send Selhim away to a Ziban Berber who lived in the oasis of Chetma.

When I told her my plans, she seemed to like the idea immensely, though her gaiety was marred by a note of sadness in her voice. I wondered which was the more sincere and deeper feeling, the sadness or the joy.

Half an hour after we made arrangements for her departure, Selhim disappeared of her own accord. Old Zohra, whom I sent in search for her, returned without having been able to find any traces of the girl. Deciding to investigate the matter personally, I wandered through the city. I finally came upon her near the tomb of the Marabout Zerzur in company with the mysterious Arab whom I had seen from my window and who turned out to be an elderly man with a pock-marked face and a film over one eye.

"He is certainly not handsome!" I thought. "What can she see in him?"

The moment she saw me, Selhim blushed crimson with embarrassment.

"What are you doing here, Selhim?" I asked sternly. "You must leave at once; your camel is awaiting you."

"I know, Sidi, that you are sending me to Chetma," she replied, emphasizing the name of the oasis; "but I had to talk something over with this *mumen*."

"I do not wish to interfere with your affairs," I exclaimed indignantly, "but I insist that you leave Biskra without delay. Do you understand?"

"You have spoken, Sidi!" she answered and, bowing to the Arab, came over to me.

An hour later Selhim was on her way to Chetma, escorted by one of my workmen. As it was not a long journey, something less than eight kilometres, the workman was to bring the camel back that same day. When he returned, he told me of the very warm welcome given Selhim in the house of my friends and also of a most amiable travelling-companion who had joined them on the way to Chetma.

From the workman's description I at once recognized the pock-marked Arab. My man was full of admiration for this new-made friend, who could sing beautiful songs and knew wonderful tales of heroes, sultans, Turkish beys and the saints.

I was furious . . . that Arab again! I could not sleep throughout the night and was absent-minded in the office, a fact which was remarked upon by my chief. I had to admit to myself quite frankly that I was jealous of Selhim. I worried about her and wondered what she was doing and what people had gone with her to Chetma. A strange feeling of pain and cold stole into my heart.

I decided to investigate the matter thoroughly and started my examination with Zohra. Before I had time to finish my first question, the old woman began to sob bitterly.

"What is the matter?" I asked, fearing something terrible.

"The house will soon be bereft of our sun, our flower and our happiness!" the old woman wailed, wringing her hands. "That man wants to marry Lalla Selhim to his eldest boy and thus to bring the rays of the sun upon his own house and deprive us of our talisman. Oh, Lalla Selhim!"

The following morning, under the pretext of urgent business, I went to Chetma and found Selhim surrounded by a group of women, to whom she was telling fortunes. The pock-marked Arab sat in the corner smoking *kif*.

Selhim greeted me indifferently and even, as I thought, with a shade of coolness. When I asked her how she was and how she felt in her new surroundings, she replied that she was quite well and very pleased with her life in Chetma.

Disguising the real reason for my journey, I took the host aside and discussed with him the prospects for the date-crop, although I had some time before received full information from him. Then, quite by chance, I was left alone with the pock-marked Arab.

"You have apparently a good deal of leisure, *mumen*, if you can wander from Biskra to Chetma whenever you choose," I observed to him, looking directly into his eyes.

"By Allah," he exclaimed, "what a strange coincidence, Sidi! I was just now thinking the same of you."

I must admit that his impudent rebuttal embarrassed me considerably. Recovering from my surprise and indignation, I commenced a new attack.

"You do not live in Biskra or Tuggurt, for I have never seen you in either of these places. Where then do you live, my friend?"

"In Chetma."

"I know this! I am asking for your permanent domicile."

"My only permanent abode, Sidi, like that of any other man, is my grave," he retorted, shaking his head mourn-



fully. "Thus spake some three hundred years ago that pious and virtuous saint, Sidi Sliman Abu Smaha, the one belonging to the tribe of the Meharza, who camp in the rocky El Golea, where . . ."

"I am not asking for history. Where is your house?"

"Nowhere!" he chuckled, looking mockingly at me.

"What do you mean by 'nowhere'?"

"I have no house, Sidi," continued the Arab, raising his pipe. "I have only a tent, a beautiful sapphire tent, for I am a nomad."

"Where then is your camp?" I continued, as though I were a police officer.

"In the Sahara, Sidi," he replied, sucking his pipe. "That is where my sapphire tent is pitched!"

Our conversation was interrupted by the entrance of the host, his wife and Selhim, bringing with them tea, dried figs and dates, cakes and French caramels purchased from my stores. As soon as the long and tiresome ceremony of preparing and drinking the tea was over, I left Chetma with great anxiety in my heart.

A new, immense care tormented me day and night. Every time I had a free moment I used to ride over from Biskra to Chetma and no longer attempted to disguise the true reason for my visits. My friend, at whose house Selhim stayed, always met me with a meaning smile, although he never said a word. Selhim became gradually more and more cool and indifferent toward me, while the pock-marked Arab blinked at me with his mocking eye, bowed in exaggerated servility and somehow always managed to prevent my being left alone with Selhim.

One day I beckoned to the host and whispered to him:

"Send everyone out of the room. I want to talk to Selhim about private matters."

When I was left alone with Selhim I began:

"Are you happy here?"

"Oh, yes!" she replied. "I should like to remain here until the day when I leave Biskra for good."

"Are you thinking of leaving these parts? I have heard nothing of this before. You might inform me of your intentions!"

"Nothing is as yet certain, Sidi," she replied indifferently. "When I do know something definite, I shall no doubt tell you, for I regard you as my master and father."

"As your father?" I repeated laughingly, though my gaiety was certainly forced. "You spoke to me differently before, Selhim."

"Differently?" she queried. "Did I not always respect you, Sidi?"

I was in despair. I bent over her and whispered:

"There by the black rocks you spoke to me of *deba*."

Blood rushed to her cheeks and strange lights began to glimmer in her beautiful eyes. A moment later she drooped her head and spoke in low whispers:

"Old times! . . . You do not want the *deba* of a savage woman of the desert!"

I would have caught her in my arms and declared my love for her then and there, but suddenly the pock-marked Arab entered the room. Even to-day I am at a loss to understand why I did not strangle him on the spot. As it was, I rose and rushed toward him with clenched fists, but checked my progress as the native, without taking the slightest notice of me, said to Selhim:

"I had a letter to-day from my son, beautiful Selhim! The young man sends you his greetings and avows his admiration, for I wrote to him what my eyes had seen."

Without a word I ran out of the room and, ignoring old Ibrahim, who stood at the gate, mounted my horse and cut loose for Biskra. The moment I arrived, I ran into the kitchen, where old Zohra was preparing dinner. Catching her by the arm, I shook the old woman like a rag and commanded:

" You must go to Chetma at once and follow Selhim like a shadow, not leaving her alone even for a second. Do not let anyone talk with her without your being present. Do you understand ? If she should want to leave Chetma, you will send old Ibrahim with a message at once. If anything should happen to Selhim, you will be responsible to me ! Remember ! "

I put the old woman on a camel and sent her off without delay.

That same day my chief informed me, to my delight, that he was leaving two days later for Algiers. These days seemed like a nightmare to me. Though I talked about business, my thoughts were with Selhim. When I looked at my superior, I saw in my imagination the one-eyed Arab sitting in his place.

On the day of his departure my guest clapped me on the shoulder and said :

" Why do you treat that beautiful girl with such maudlin sentiment ? It would be a shame to develop a real affection for such a savage woman. They are like wild animals, often beautiful and attractive, but always animals, nothing but animals. In Bizerta I once knew a Spaniard who fell in love with a Kabyle woman and afterward married her ! She was beautiful, there was no doubt about that—very beautiful ! But everyone jeered at this household. They were not received in European families and were avoided in the streets. It is a shame, a great shame, for a white man to have a coloured wife ! "

" And is there no shame in playing with them and then—chucking them out like refuse ? " I asked almost brutally.

The chief did not, apparently, understand my indignation, for he replied with a laugh and an observation that stung me with shame for him.

He departed at last, and I saddled my horse and hurried to Chetma.

On that same evening Selhim was back in my house,



37. KABYLES WORKING IN THE FIELD



38. AN OLD STREET IN ALGIERS SHOWING PIRATES' HOUSES



behaving as though she had never left it. She put everything quickly and neatly in order and then disappeared in Zohra's room.

When dinner was served, I went to her quarters and told her that from that day on she would have all her meals at my table. She started and swayed ; in a moment she was at my feet, sobbing with joy and emotion, while in a corner old Zohra wept like a child.

"Are you two mad?" I asked laughingly.

Selhim did not say anything, but pressed closer my knees and continued to weep ; Zohra, however, mumbled through her tears :

"Our good, good Sidi! You are acting justly. The *sahira* will bring you luck!"

Not understanding what it was all about, I ordered her to serve dinner.

For some time I sat at table alone, for Selhim did not appear.

"Selhim!" I called, opening the kitchen door.

"Lalla will be with you in a second ; she is dressing," Zohra explained.

A moment later she did appear, and in her best clothes—a new burnous, a new yellow *jellaba* with slippers to match and with all her jewels in her ears, hair and on her neck. However, two details of her attire surprised me—a broad, violet belt embroidered with silver flowers, which I had never seen before, and over her face a thin veil, or *ltam*, which I had given her on the first day of her stay in my house.

"Take off the *ltam*, Selhim," I said, looking at her in surprise.

"You alone, my Master, can do that," she replied, almost overcome by emotion.

Taking off the *ltam*, I uncovered her happy, radiant face and saw that her eyes were full of tears. Again she dropped to my feet and, pressing and kissing my hands, cried :

"*Deba, deba!* Your slave was dying of love for you, my Master, through all these days and nights. I was like a palm without water. Oh, my Master, my Master!"

I caught her in my arms and kissed her eyes and her lips, for I too had been a palm that was withering of thirst through all these days and nights!

At last I collected myself and said:

"You are talking about *deba* now, Selhim, but what about that Arab?"

Once more she dropped to my feet and began beating her head on the floor.

"Master, forgive your slave! I lied to you once, only once, and may Tanit punish me if I ever lie to you again! That Arab was a *meskin*, a beggar, with whom I had wandered from camp to camp while I was a *gezzana*. I arranged for him to do things that would provoke your jealousy, for my woman's heart told me that I was already in your soul! . . . He is a good man and a bard, one to whom everyone listens in the market-places, where he gathers many silver *bezetas*.<sup>1</sup> He was always very good to me, quite like a father. . . . He was afraid of you, Sidi, but he did what I bade him, for he was more frightened of me than he was of you. He knows that I am a . . . *sahira!*"

I wished my chief could have heard the confession of Selhim! Would he still persist in believing that she was only a wild animal?

After dinner I had to go to the office. When I came back Selhim was out and returned only late in the evening. She tidied my bedroom very scrupulously, lighted some red candles and burned incense of nard, various flowers and herbs.

Suddenly I heard a song being sung outside by a man and a woman.

<sup>1</sup> The people of North Africa indiscriminately call all silver coins "*bezetas*."

Béhold the hair of Selhim ! It is like unto ostrich plumes.  
O Selhim, O *sahira*, thy plaits are heavier than gold !  
Light the candles, and a house full of treasure will appear,  
But among them, like a gem without price, is Selhim !  
She is the star that shines when the night falls.

The singing stopped suddenly, the door opened and Selhim entered the room. With glowing eyes and arms outstretched she moved toward me.

“ You were the first who won my love ; you will be the last, for I love you as I love the sun and Tanit-Ashtoreth.”

On the following morning the pock-marked Arab brought his wedding-gifts—a little bag of barley, a basket of dried figs and a bowl of flour. He was followed by Zohra, who also offered her gifts. In the eyes of the Berbers and in her own opinion Selhim had become my wife. Happy and dominated by her love, I thought so too.

My friends laughed and jeered at me, so I promptly severed all my relations with them. The natives, however, held me in great respect, for they regarded as just the man who did not despise their women. They called me their brother. Thus I became a real *khuan*, a title which made me a great asset to my firm. When anti-European movements broke out among the natives, no one throughout the Sahara would sell a bag of dates or a bale of wool to a white man. At such times the great commercial houses suffered serious losses and were not infrequently threatened with bankruptcy. In contrast to this I had my regular supplies of goods from the natives and was always able to sell to them French imports. The Jewish and Berber merchants trading in the oases and villages scribbled the magic word “ *khuan* ” across cases containing my merchandise, and every nomad or farmer willingly bought all that I had to sell. The *sahira* had brought luck not only to me but also to the firm whose chief she had once scratched so savagely.

In those days my life was like a long, uninterrupted

dream. Now, after so many years, I cannot possibly recall any particular day. But I still remember isolated incidents, disconnected words and impressions, though all these were only like intenser or lighter flames in a roaring, scorching fire that is devouring a heap of dry wood or straw.

Yet in that scorching whirl Selhim directed my life, remembering everything and foreseeing everything. She would not allow me to neglect my duties, never interrupted my work and never tired me with her love or even with her presence. If I so wished, I need not have seen her for days and days.

She never asked me questions, but always waited for me to confess my troubles to her of my own accord. I hoped with her and dreamed my dreams. Never did she ask me for an oath or even for a promise. One day I exclaimed in a burst of emotion :

“ Let the greatest misfortune fall upon my head, if I ever forget you or your love for even the briefest instant ! ”

At this Selhim placed her hand on my shoulder and said in a serious voice :

“ Your heart feels now what your lips have spoken.”

“ Not only now, but always ! ” I warmly protested.

“ The word ‘ always ’ does not exist on earth,” she whispered. “ It dwells in heaven among the gods, my dearest ! It is written in the Book of Destiny and speaks but of One. It is a word as lonely as a rock rising above the sands of the desert.”

Although I did not quite follow these complicated thoughts of my beloved, I raised my hand and, in all solemnity, pledged myself :

“ In the name of God Almighty and of His Son, crucified by men in the blindness of spite and anger, I swear that I shall never to the last breath of my life forget you, Selhim, even for one short moment. If I break this oath, let God Almighty punish me ! ”

For the first time during my stay in Africa I thought of

God and of His Son. I was never religious and looked upon religion as a prejudice, a superstition of old people. I never mentioned the name of Allah save when I was contracting with the natives for supplies or concluding commercial agreements with them.

Overcome by the solemnity of my oath, Selhim looked at me, folded her hands as if for prayer and began to speak in a low, quiet whisper :

"Sunshine of my life ! Pride of my heart ! I have one favour to ask of you, only one."

"There is nothing I would not do for you !" I exclaimed.

"Selhim is a *sahira*, as you well know, and believes in her talismans and charms. . . . I want to ask you to let me make the sign of the goddess Tanit on your breast just above your heart. . . . Let me ! It will guard your heart from temptation and will preserve it for me, her priestess."

"Is that all ?" I exclaimed. "Certainly ! Do it now."

That evening Selhim began to tattoo my breast. First she rubbed on some green fluid and then pricked a design with a long, sharp needle, finally rubbing in a dye of aloe-juice mixed with *hedta* and henna. My skin became swollen and tender, but all this passed after a day or two. Over my heart the magic sign was visible—a red moon between the horns of a bull, with a little cross underneath it.

Selhim was overjoyed and repeatedly said to me :

"I can hear your heart. . . . It beats differently now. It is mine, mine !"

For me, Sir, it was only a woman's fancy and nothing more. I did not then realize what that sign was supposed to mean. Only some years later, when I was talking about tattooing with some friends in Paris and told them about the symbol on my chest, a scientist who was present asked me to show it to him. Having carefully examined and copied the tattooing, he decided a few days later that it was the authentic symbol of the Phœnician goddess Baalat-



Ashtoreth, known in Carthage as Tanit or Tanit-Ashtoreth. The little cross was identical with one which was found on a marble statue representing the Carthaginian goddess of heaven.

For some time after this incident my life continued as the staging of a dream. Later some changes were introduced into my mode of living, when some of my friends, who had been on leave in France, returned with their wives. These were shortly followed by mothers and sisters. The Frenchwomen looked at me with curiosity, for everyone knew about my romance. Some of them met Selhim in the various shops and soon made her acquaintance. No one could help liking her. With her beautiful, sweet and at the same time serious features, her golden hair, her translucid, dark eyes, her melodious voice, her fresh, scarlet lips and her pearly, glistening teeth, Selhim was an ideal of beauty and charm.

The French ladies soon began to adore her, and often during my absences from home came to see her, primarily attracted by her knowledge of occult science. She told their fortunes and recounted various incidents from their past lives; and, since she was in general quite accurate, she was held in such great respect that an ever-growing number of European women came to seek her counsel and advice. My commercial successes were also credited to Selhim's magic, all of which added to her charm and surrounded us both with a halo of mystery, envy and respect. Gradually the Europeans began to acknowledge us as their equals and received us in their homes, whereupon we in turn entertained in our own house.

One day I found Selhim pondering deeply over something with clouded brows. As I had never seen her in such a mood before, I asked her the cause of her sadness or dissatisfaction.

"I don't know yet," she replied, confused; "not yet."

Later, placing her head on my shoulder, she pleaded :

“ Tell me something about your own gods ! I want to know everything about them ! ”

It was a difficult problem for me, as I really remembered very little of the Scriptures or the catechism. Some complicated, disjointed facts and confused snatches of prayers were all that I could find in my memory.

However, Selhim, deeply absorbed in everything I told her, analysed each sentence and, putting very logical questions to me, almost compelled me to recall the forgotten incidents or omitted words. She was especially impressed by my narrative of the life of Christ. She pondered a great deal over this and a few days later came to me and said :

“ The Prophet Aïssa <sup>1</sup> was really not only a Prophet but also a God. Now I am certain of it.”

“ Whence this certainty ? ” I asked.

“ A mere man can never entirely forget self for the sake of other men. God alone is capable of it. Aïssa did that, so he must be a God, a good God ! ”

“ But have there not been other men who have sacrificed their lives or their welfare for the benefit of others ? ”

“ Oh yes ! But these have had in life their joy and their happiness ; they have had their houses, families and children, respect and fame ; but Aïssa was all alone. He had no love, no friends. That beautiful woman who anointed His feet and wiped them with her hair loved Him like a God, in the same way that I love Tanit, but not as I love you. The apostles did not love Him, for, if they had, they would not have deserted Him when He stood surrounded by His foes. They would not have obeyed His command and left Him defenceless. Aïssa performed His good works without Himself knowing happiness ! He must be God ! ”

Her voice carried such conviction that she seemed like an inspired missionary of the Christian faith among the

<sup>1</sup> The Arabic name for Christ.

wild tribes of Africa. How strange it seemed—a *sahira* and a priestess of Tanit, yet a champion of the divine origin of Christ.

She next asked me to teach her “my faith.”

“Teach me how to offer prayers to Aïssa! What hour of the day does He like best? What talismans should I wear to please Him? What charms and adjurations will make Him turn His eyes upon those who call upon His name? Tell me!”

I could not satisfy Selhim’s desires, for I did not know all this myself. When she persisted, I took her to a White Friar<sup>1</sup> who lived in Biskra and asked him to instruct her in the Catholic faith.

The monk, whom I met shortly afterward, was very enthusiastic about the intelligence of his new convert, who was shortly reputed to have learned much of the New Testament by heart. He could not, however, break her of two of her former practices. When she was surprised she always clapped her hands and exclaimed:

“By Tanit! By Ashtoreth!”

The other pagan characteristic which worried the White Friar was the manner in which Selhim invariably began her prayers:

“May Thine ancient Name be blessed!”

This gave rise to anxiety and doubt in the heart of the Christian missionary, who confessed to me that he could not find the explanation for these words. When I asked Selhim about it, she replied without hesitation:

“Every God is ancient and already lived when there were no men on earth. His ancient name is also divine. At first it enters the souls of men from the air, from the water, from all of life, and only later the realization of the God bearing this name enters the heart and the mind. Do you understand?”

<sup>1</sup> The Order of the *Pères Blancs* of the Sahara, established by Cardinal Lavigerie.

I did not, but I repeated her explanation to the Friar, who pondered it deeply and finally observed :

“ This woman is right . . . Logos, yes, she refers to Logos, the subconscious belief in the existence of divine wisdom and power.”

I understood very little of this, but did not pursue the subject, for it was neither love nor wool nor dates.

A few months after this conversation Selhim returned from the Friar very sad and angry. She would not tell me what had happened, but on that same day I met the missionary and learned from him that Selhim had insisted that she be baptized forthwith.

“ I advised her, however, to wait,” continued the Friar. “ I realized that the woman loves you and wants to have the same God that you have, so that you can both pray to Him and live in accordance with His commandments ; but the Church admits to her fold only those who are prompted by spiritual and moral, but not by earthly motives. Besides, should she meet with disappointment and misfortune in her future life, she would renounce the hasty step, and thus draw down upon her head the wrath of God. Let us clear the situation first.”

“ I do not understand what you mean.”

“ Do you intend to marry Selhim in accordance with the sacraments of the Church ? ” the White Friar asked abruptly.

I started, for this had never entered my head. According to the traditions of her tribe she was already my wife.

“ I had never thought of this,” I muttered.

“ Well, there you are,” said the monk. “ Let Selhim wait until the situation is cleared.”

In my heart I felt a sudden reversion of feeling and even indignation against Selhim. I—marry her, and marry her in a church ? For the first time the pride of a European, the contempt of the white race for coloured peoples, flared within me and poisoned my happiness. It seemed to me as

though some one was constantly putting evil thoughts of Selhim into my head, which evoked suspicion and doubt. I felt that my sentiments toward her had suddenly undergone a violent change and I began to look at her with a critical eye, that eye which sleeps when we love some one and place our trust in him or her. I noticed that her gestures were slave-like and full of servility, that she did not know how to behave at dinner, that she repeated the same phrases over and over again and that my European friends spoke to her with a patronizing smile and not infrequently with sarcasm.

"She is a beautiful animal, but that is not sufficient for a man of culture," I thought with bitterness and hidden contempt.

But, alas! the cultured man had thought of this only after he had set the life of another human being upon a difficult and dangerous path.

At first Selhim did not seem to notice the change that had taken place in me. She spent all her time doing good deeds and looking after the poor and sick. With the White Friar she visited filthy dens of beggars, washed and cured the children, helped the poor women and collected clothes, food and money for them. She really lived according to the commands of Aïssa.

She did not, however, neglect her household duties; but she so constantly sought to avoid me that often I did not see her for days and days on end. Gradually she ceased to visit her friends; and often, as I came home late in the evening, I saw a light in her room. Interested in what the *sahira* could be doing so late at night, I went round the house one evening and looked into her window. Selhim lay on the floor with her arms outstretched and her whole body heaving with vehement sobs. I thought all this was due to the religious experience she was undergoing and consequently did not try to console her.

It so happened just at this time that I was forced to keep



my room through a recurrence of the fever which I had contracted on the coast. The attacks were intermittent and frequent, always causing great pain and exhaustion. At last I had to go to bed and stay there until the doctor would allow me to get up.

It happened that Selhim was away when I was taken ill. I did not leave any message for her, but just went to bed after having taken a stiff dose of quinine. The next I knew I heard by my side the trembling voice of Selhim and the deeper tones of Zohra.

"What has happened to you, Sidi?" asked the *sahira*. "I was praying in the chapel when suddenly I saw you pale and thin and hardly able to move. When you drew away into a dark corner and disappeared, I immediately came here."

I was amazed at her gift of clairvoyance, but, of course, I knew she was a *kahina* and a *sahira*.

Like a faithful, disconsolate dog she sat by my bed day and night, ministering to my needs and watching me from the corners of her eyes. Sometimes she fixed on me a saddened gaze, full of anxiety and yearning; and, whenever I caught her glance, she turned away from me and began to busy herself about the room, obviously seeking to avoid conversation.

I noticed that on her breast she was wearing a large cross which had been given to her by the White Friar.

"You are a Christian now and worship our God, Aïssa," I remarked one day, in order to break an awkward silence.

"I carry the sign of His Passion," she replied, "for I wish to ascertain if your God is omnipotent."

"Do you doubt it?"

"I do not, but I want to be quite certain, Sidi!"

"You again call me 'Sidi,' Selhim. You have not spoken to me thus for a long time."

"It is better, Sidi . . ."

"Why?"

"Because you are—a Sidi," she muttered.

"Well then, I shall call you 'Lalla,' " I chuckled.

"Very well," she agreed without protest, "for I am a *lalla*, inasmuch as I am a *sahira*. Sorceresses are held in great respect by the nomads, and no one would think of regarding them as inferior beings, almost as animals, Sidi. . . . Yes, Sidi, call me 'Lalla,' for I prefer this to . . ."

"To what? Finish your sentence, Selhim."

"Do not press me for an answer, for I do not want to give it; and you, Sidi, would not like to hear it," she said vehemently.

"You are a strange woman, Selhim. Probably you do not love me any more."

At first she made no response, but after a few moments' silence she came close to me and spoke softly:

"I love you as that beautiful woman loved Aïssa. . . . You are everything to me, you give me everything; but I feel that I am dying of hunger, thirst and . . . cold."

She ran out of the room. After a while she returned with tearful eyes, silent but composed and collected. Again she sat by my side, looked after everything and nursed me like a baby. She no longer went to church nor to see the White Friar and neglected her beggars and orphans; she was constantly near me, and in that her whole life was centred.

For a long time I struggled with myself before I at last decided to speak to her.

"Would you like to be my wife?"

"I was your wife, Sidi, for my heart and my body I gave to you to the last shred, to the last thought hidden in my brain."

"You *were*? Then you are not any longer?"

"You best know this, Sidi!" she replied, shaking her head. "When a cloud overshadows love in one's heart, it is impossible to see one's wife."

"I do not quite understand," I continued.

" You look upon a woman—her body—if she is beautiful ; you listen to her voice, if it is melodious : but this happens only when an errant ray penetrates the darkness of the cloud."

" There is no cloud here under the sign of Tanit," I laughingly retorted, touching the tattoo-mark on my chest.

" There is a cloud there, Sidi ; and once there it will become blacker and denser, so that the rays will not penetrate it."

" Does this mean that Tanit had thwarted you ? " I asked, looking intently at Selhim.

" Tanit is the goddess of those who love only once in their lives, even if they have to give their lives for those whom they love ! " she whispered, pressing her hands to her breast.

I was silent. After a moment she continued :

" Love is a flower. Once it is withered, it will never raise its beautiful petals to the sun again ! It is like a captured bird—once it flies away, it will never return."

" A bird can be caught and replaced in its cage," I remarked.

" It will only fly away the next time it is free, so why should we imprison it ? "

Her last words were spoken with such conviction, with such grief and resignation, that I felt it would be impossible to alter her decision or to console her in her grief.

After this conversation, strange and unfinished as it was, our relations became more and more strained and insincere. Whenever we were left alone, we both felt considerable embarrassment and uneasiness and did not know what to talk about. Such meaningless phrases were exchanged that I was always relieved when I was left alone again.

Meanwhile my illness persisted. One day the new doctor who had but recently arrived in Biskra came to see me unexpectedly. I had met him once or twice at the houses of mutual friends. He had been told about my fever and

came to visit me professionally, bringing with him his sister, a girl of eighteen, to whom I had promised to show my collection of ancient jewelry, "roses of the desert" and native talismans.

The doctor was indignant that I had not summoned a medical man but had tried to cure myself with quack remedies and barbarian herbs. He prescribed for me and promised to come again in the evening.

However, while it was still afternoon, some one knocked at the door. It was the doctor's sister, Mademoiselle Yvette.

"Do you know what my brother has told me?" she began. "These protracted African or Indo-Chinese fevers have usually their origin in the nervous system. Living in lonely surroundings and an unwholesome climate, a man does not notice that his nerves are gradually becoming weaker and weaker; this nervous derangement undermines the constitution and renders it susceptible to all diseases and epidemics. I have come to help your recovery. I want to entertain you and disperse all sombre thoughts, if you have any at present."

"I have," I said almost unconsciously.

"Well then, I shall begin my duties by reading to you the latest novel of Anatole France. Do you know it?"

She showed me the title-page. Naturally I did not know the book, for in those stormy days there was little opportunity or time for reading.

Mademoiselle Yvette seated herself comfortably in an armchair and began to read in a clear, even voice. I was greatly absorbed in the plot, and somehow my usual evening paroxysm of fever did not appear, though two hours later I did have the ague. The girl stayed on, anxious to finish a chapter which she had already begun.

I ordered some tea. Selhim entered, prepared every thing and wanted to leave the room, but I stopped her.

"Remain with us," I said.

"Pardon me, Sidi, but I have to go, as the White Friar is waiting for me," she replied calmly, and left the room.

Mademoiselle Yvette read on. I looked at her golden head, bent over the table. There was some unusual repose and purity in this girl. I felt an aroma of freshness, as if a fragrant breeze of the sea had entered the room.

I realized that this woman, akin to me by class and race and by the instincts of her mind, was like my sister. I could talk with her about everything, and she would understand all my experiences and all my impressions. She was a kindred human being. We might even fall in love with each other; but love would be born simultaneously in the heart and in the brain. It would not rage in my blood, it would not rush past like a storm, wonderful and exhilarating but destructive. When she had closed her book and finished her tea, she gave me a sincere grasp of the hand and said:

"Until to-morrow! I shall come to see you in the afternoon."

"You are very good to me, Mademoiselle," I exclaimed enthusiastically, holding her hand in mine. "Thank you very, very much. I shall always remember your kindness."

Just at that moment the door opened and Selhim entered the room. She saw our leave-taking and heard what I said. She very courteously said good-bye to the girl and accompanied her to the door. When she returned, I could not see any signs of emotion on her features. She arranged my bed, placed the medicine and a pitcher of water on my table and started to go out, when I stopped her with the request:

"Stay here with me for a while."

"Let me go, Sidi! A storm is raging in my heart; my soul is dark and gloomy."

"Are you disturbed because Mademoiselle Yvette came to see me?"

"No," she replied, "for I know that, when birds fly away



for the winter, each bird seeks one like itself, so that they can fly together ; but those that fly alone have yearning, dark and grieving souls, Sidi ! I must go now."

"As you wish," I muttered.

I should not have said this. A man may pay all his life for such an error.

The next day, after Mademoiselle Yvette had gone, Selhim entered the room and handed me a curved native dagger.

"What does this mean ? " I asked in amazement.

"I wanted at first to kill that woman, but now I want to follow Aïssa. Let your happiness come to you out of my torture."

When she had spoken thus, she ran out of the house. I heard her come back later and lock herself in her room. Instinctively, almost automatically, I began to dress, intending to go and find her, when suddenly I noticed the sweet aroma of incense filling my room. I pressed my ear to the wall and could hear Selhim's voice. Its sounds were sharp, sibilant and commanding.

I went outside and looked through the window. She was sitting on the floor ; her breast was covered with ropes of amulets and talismans, while magic signs were scribbled on her burnous. Around her glimmered the light from several candles, and in front of her stood a small brazier with burning coals. Over it she held a little clay statuette of a woman. From time to time she dropped a pinch of incense on the coals and, when a roll of smoke appeared, broke off pieces from the statuette and threw them into the fire, all the time muttering incantations.

The next morning, when Mademoiselle Yvette arrived, Selhim came into the room clad in her best garments. Her face was pale, and her eyes spelled evil.

"How are you, Mademoiselle ? " she inquired.

"Thank you, Selhim, I am very well indeed," the girl replied.



39. THE MOHAMMEDAN CEMETERY, ALGIERS



40, PROFESSOR F. A. OSSENDOWSKI

Throughout the following week Selhim persistently inquired about Mademoiselle's health.

At the end of these days she came to me one evening, gazed into my eyes with one long, penetrating look and—went out. I did not stop her, for our relations were already strained almost to the breaking-point.

The following morning Zohra came in wringing her hands and crying :

“ Lalla ! Lalla ! ”

“ What has happened ? ” I asked, springing from my bed and fearing something terrible.

“ Lalla disappeared from the house last night . . . disappeared ! ” moaned Zohra. “ No one saw her go. She just vanished.”

I hurried into Selhim's room. Everything lay tidily in its place. On the table, all the jewelry and presents I had given her were carefully collected. Only an ear-ring was missing, the one with the enamel beads which had been placed in my amulet with the scrawled word *deba*.

Forebodings gripped my heart.

“ Look there, Sidi, there ! ” whispered Zohra, pointing to the table.

Some pieces of wood lay upon it. When I examined them, I realized everything quite as fully as if Selhim had explained it all to me. Tormented by jealousy and despair, Selhim had reverted and had once more sought the aid of her magic science. She had made a statuette of the French girl and, with all the prescribed adjurations, had broken it into tiny pieces and thrown these into the flames, a procedure which was counted upon to cause the illness and even the death of her rival. When, however, the magic produced no effect, the savage, passionate *sahira* had concluded that the goddess Tanit and her djinns had turned away from her as punishment for her conversion to the doctrine of Aïssa.

Then she had decided to revolt against Him. I had in



my hands the pathetic evidence of this revolt—the broken pieces of the cross which the White Friar had blessed and given to the despairing *sahira*.

Selhim vanished without leaving a trace. No one was able to give any information. They searched for her everywhere, and I offered a large reward for her discovery.

Following her disappearance I was oppressed by fear, anxiety and foreboding. I avoided company and did not see or entertain anyone. Everyone in the city thought I was insane. I, however, understood and realized everything; I knew that a terrible disaster was creeping toward me like a ghastly, poisonous snake from some black, unknown abyss.

It was Christmas Eve. I sat alone in my room, thinking of Selhim. The clock struck eleven. Just as it finished, there came a knock at the door. When Zohra opened it, I could hear a man's voice explaining something to her.

A moment later the old woman rushed into my room, sobbing and tearing her hair.

"Lalla! Lalla!" she shrieked, and fell on the ground moaning and lamenting.

A tall Arab entered my room. He had a flowing black beard, thin lips and vindictive eyes. Immediately I recognized a Mzabite, an inhabitant of the gloomy, barren plain of Mzab.

"Sidi," he said dryly, "in the bed of the Lua River our men have found the woman for whom you have offered the reward. She must have lost her way in the desert and perished from hunger and thirst. I have brought you something that was found on her body."

With these words he handed me a silver ear-ring with beads of coloured enamel. On the ring itself the word *deba* was scratched in clumsy letters.

I shall not tell you what I suffered then and have suffered



ever since. I felt that I was a murderer, for no doubt I was directly responsible for the woman's death. . . . In time my wounds began to heal. In later years I even thought I loved another woman, but, when I opened my lips to tell her so, I heard the distant whisper of Selhim :

" You were the first and the last. From your hands I took my death."

Now in my old age I am left alone in the world, haunted by despair and bitter reproach, and can only wander back and forth between France and Algeria. I have only just come back from the Chebka desert, where I visited the dry bed of the Lua. Each year I go there, thinking I am stepping on the ground she trod, imagining I hear her last whisper and hoping she will return to me, with that soft voice saying :

" I have forgiven everything, for now I know I have been your 'first and last.' " But she does not come . . . she does not come !

\*            \*            \*            \*            \*

Monsieur Dufait rose hastily from his chair and, pressing my hand, disappeared in the turmoil of the street.

Such were my last impressions of North Africa and they were significant, for they told of two different psychologies—the sensual, mystic soul of the East, unflinching in love or in hate, and the sober, dominating soul of the West.

I thought then that many, many years must elapse and many storms rage over the earth before these two souls would understand each other and say :

" We have forgiven all."

I deeply sympathized with Monsieur Dufait in his tragedy—the tragedy of a man tormented by his conscience. I was grateful to him for his narrative, through which he introduced me to the real life of a Mussulman woman,

hidden ordinarily from the eyes of strangers, and to a whirl of adventures, either violent and raving like the simoon, or full of despair and abandon like the thoughts of a man who, deserted by everyone in the desert, at last reaches the refreshing stream that slowly kills him with its poisoned water.

## CHAPTER XIII

### THE RIDDLE OF NORTH AFRICA

AT last we are on board the large steamer that is to take us from Algiers to Marseilles. The silhouettes of our friends standing on the quay are disappearing in the distance, and gradually, as if melting in the mist, the white, glistening walls of Algiers fade out and after them the line of the shore and the mountains of Kabylia.

As we watch the receding land, my thoughts run back to those ancient days when the history of the Western World was being moulded in the basin of this sea.

Two thousand years ago the galleys of the enterprising and adventurous Phœnicians cut these same waves on their westward cruises to the unknown. Through these waters the triremes of the city of Dido and Salammbo were swiftly driven by their banks of oars. Then came the fleet of Rome across this sea to the shore of Africa, to that Carthage which was the mighty rival of the Cæsars.

Vandals from the north, sly Greeks from decaying Byzantium, proud and courageous pashas and beys of Turkey, bloodthirsty pirates, the mighty armadas of Spain, the fleets of the Moorish kings—all sailed these waters and fought for their domination in the realization that the control of this sea was the key to power in the then-known world.

As the shores of Africa vanish in the azure waves, I range the southern horizon and in my mind's eye seem to see the whole of the northern shore of the continent, the beautiful, prosperous cities, parks, roads and plantations, that rich harvest of the enterprise and effort of the white race; the eagles'-nests of the Kabyles, the *kasbas* of the highlanders

of the Atlas, the poor villages of Berbers and the *duars* of the Tuareg warriors ; the ancient walls of Fez, Mulay Idris and Marrakesh ; mosques, graveyards and *kubbas* ; flocks of sheep on the high table-lands ; skeletons of Roman and Phœnician cities, such as Tebessa, Timgad, Lambèze and Carthage ; picturesque oases with their golden and coral dates ripening among the emerald leaves of the palms ; further on, the lifeless, yellow Sahara, the home of death, of the simoon and of nomads with souls filled with mysterious and strange impulses.

As imperceptible murmurs, as distant, muffled whispers, I can hear the turmoil of the cities, the din of the *suks*, the shouts of the cattle-drovers, the pitiful moaning of the camels, the far-reaching calls of the muezzins, the pious monotones of Arabs and Berbers offering their prayers to Allah, the threatening shouts of revolting tribes, the roar of the wind and the heart-rending sobs of Selhim and of thousands of others who, like her, are slaves of their bodies and souls.

A white man set his foot upon this strange, mysterious land. He surveyed the plains and mountains and the heat-tormented desert ; he watched the men of the country and sensed in them a passive, paralysing submission to the verdicts of a destiny that was driving them to the abyss of non-existence ; he understood their souls, indifferent to things material but responding to the call of war that was to be waged for the glory of the Prophet—he realized all this, understood it and began his work. It was a difficult task, teeming with danger and provoking storm and disaster.

Have you ever seen the air motionless, as if drugged by the rays of the scorching sun ? Not a leaf will quiver on its branch ; there is no breeze, no refreshing current of air. And yet a rider, speeding by on his swift charger, will feel the stimulating passage of the air, and behind him the leaves will move and clouds of dust will be raised

under the impetus of the wind that is born of the passing steed.

Have you ever seen a pond all overgrown with weeds when no swallow has touched it with its sharp wing, no fish has splashed and no insect disturbed its motionless surface?

But let a man fling a little stone into it, and the water will glitter in thousands of coloured sparks, tiny waves will ring the smooth surface, the green carpet of weeds will undulate and for a long time the pond will remain disturbed. In one short flash a man awakened the dormant pool—and thus it was in Africa.

Every movement of a white man causes a storm in this dying, motionless land.

Let us look into the interior of that country that is fading from my eyes as I gaze southward from the deck of this European steamer. Is it not that motionless, swooned air? Is it not that deep, sleeping pond? Are not the seeds of the simoon and of other mysterious, sombre powers germinating in that immobility, in that threatening quiet? Is there a hope for the achievement of the great task of linking the East with the West?

I have met Moslems of various nations in Asia and in Africa; and all these were only Moslems, indifferent to the fate of their nations and their states, ignoring and often despising the products of European civilization. It is all one soul, one nation, one ideal, one great, limitless ocean of humanity, whose waves wash the shores of the Pacific, of the Indian Ocean, of the Atlantic and of the Mediterranean.

Is there a hope of linking the soul of the East with the soul of the West, the spirit of Islam with the spirit of Christianity? To this I shall make answer with another question:

Is there a hope of traversing virgin jungles without an axe?



Western thought, like a bold traveller, does not fear the unknown dangers of the jungle, of towering mountains, of treacherous swamps and barren deserts. It marches on, fighting, conquering or—perishing. The unknown, mysterious force embedded in the brain and blood of the white race drives it onward further and further.

In this progress our civilization has come in contact with Islam, which is an international religion and ideology above all nationalistic conceptions ; an ideology encompassed by the narrow bounds of Koranic law and unchanging tradition ; a strong conviction of all Mussulmans as to their absolute mental and moral superiority over all infidels ; an unflinching belief in fate and destiny, a belief quite hostile to progress and civilization ; a conviction that all effort to alter existing conditions is against the principles of Allah's teaching.

It is a jungle that must be approached with an axe.

What agreement can be reached with men who carry in their souls the conviction that only they are in possession of the absolute truth ? What common road can we find to travel with an immense body of men among whom you can hear to this day the voice of an exalted *tholba* or *wali* crying :

“ *Ama el-Hakk* (I am Truth) ! ”

There can be no alliance, no common ideal with Islam. Having carefully watched the development of European policy, I can state this emphatically.

The white race must not lose sight of the fact that the Mussulman covets and is jealous of the earth and heaven. The Moslem holds that on this earth, from one end to the other and in its furthestmost corners, the faith of the Prophet should flourish and the one and only Islamic Empire should rule. All *mumeni* know this and believe in it, and sooner or later struggle for it.

A distinct element continuously kindles and incites this hope for the reign of Islam—the Mahdis, who are the

militant leaders, apostles of Holy War, the chosen ones of Allah and His warriors ; and the Caliphs, who plan and strive for the unification of all Mussulmans into one vast and undivided empire. These elements excite the never-dying hatred of the Moslems for the infidel giaours and *berrania*.

The Prophet Mohammed, a son of the Arab nation, generated that hatred in his stern, unyielding heart and bequeathed it to all his followers, to all peoples worshipping his Master ; for in the sacred book of the Koran he pronounces these destructive words :

“ With your swords ye shall fight those who believe not in the One God and in the Last Judgment ; those who are not of the true faith ; those who do not consider as forbidden that which is forbidden by Allah and by His Prophet ; these ye shall fight until, beaten and subdued, they pay you homage.”

The Moslems are jealous not only of the supremacy on earth but also of that in heaven ; for heaven, with its radiant happiness and undisturbed peace, belongs exclusively to them. They alone can enter the Kingdom as reward for their fidelity to Allah, for virtues, for observance of the laws of the Koran, for hatred of the infidel and for war against him, for remaining *mujahids* (warriors of the Prophet) and *chahids* (martyrs) not only through the storms of Holy War but also in their everyday life of misery and privation.

All our European civilization, whether moral, material or social, our art, literature, science and philosophy, must be and is combated by strict Mussulmans ; for the Koran says nothing about the art and literature of the infidel, so that it cannot be approved by Allah and consequently must be forbidden. Hence the indifference and hostility toward non-Mussulman progress.

However, the march of European civilization has carried us past the Pillars of Hercules of our Christian world out

upon the great, calm-looking but treacherous ocean of Islam. Europe was driven to this by reasons of historical logic, reasons which are often stronger than moral considerations. There came a period of armed expeditions against Mussulman peoples and tribes, a period followed by the present era of colonization and commercial expansion. The Moslem nations submitted to the invaders after a desperate struggle and now exist passively by the side of the conquering intruders. From time to time an insurrection, revolt or disturbance will take place here or there, but modern weapons and the modern political system quell the outbreak, after which there follows a period of peace and quiet, too often filled, however, with threatening ebullitions that evoke suspicion and fear.

He who knows the soul of the Mussulman will never feel secure, for he will remember that the psychologic and moral basis of Islam lies in Asia, that continent of storms, of civilization-destroying disasters, of mysticism of ideas and words—that continent which has discovered a formula that runs :

“ The thought should be hidden behind the words. For a greater end, smaller aims should be sacrificed.”

Islam, mindful of this principle of Asiatic philosophy, permits its followers to place their necks resignedly under the yokes of powerful invaders, conquerors and oppressors, whom they, the *mumeni* of Allah, hate and despise as rabid dogs. For the greater end of establishing a Mussulman Empire, Islam acquiesces in the abandonment of lesser ones ; in certain cases it allows the Moslems to depart from the strict letter of the Koran, to worship other gods and even to ridicule the Prophet. The Mussulman legislators have also created a separate diplomatic language, a whole vocabulary of words which have double or ambiguous meanings, an elusive phraseology that is insincere and treacherous. Such has been the position throughout the whole period of European colonization and such is the true position to-day.

Let us then turn our attention to our own time, which furnishes us with the best-known and most significant examples. The Great War, causing a natural weakness in the régime of European states in their overseas colonies, has given rise to a series of upheavals and disturbances among the Mussulman population. One set of these results of the war, and particularly of the Russian Revolution, has been the rebellions among the Tartars, Bashkirs and Kirghiz of Russia. In Africa the struggle for Egyptian independence encouraged Abd el-Krim to launch his war against Spain in the Rif. The neutral and apparently favourable attitude which France maintained at the outset led him to believe in the pacifism of the Republic and emboldened him to cross the Franco-Spanish frontier into Morocco—a step which has resulted in disaster for the Riffians and for others of the insurgent tribes.

Thus the anti-British movement in Egypt re-echoed in Morocco, where the bitter struggle in the Rif in turn aroused the political aspirations of the young Tunisians and the young Algerians ; nor is it improbable that this Egyptian upheaval was also instrumental in fomenting the outbreak in Syria. All these disturbances are like the waves that radiate over the surface of the pond after the stone has been tossed into it.

European policy should always have considered these perfectly natural and obvious possibilities and, in enforcing its measures, should have guarded not only individual, national and economic interests but the interests of all white men working among Mussulman peoples. This would by no means be a form of political idealism but merely a wise and practical policy.

I can firmly assert that the present colonial policy of Europe has come face to face with a most formidable wall, which cannot be scaled by means of an unsteady, fluctuating policy of wars at one time and agreements and alliances at another.



The wall can be blown up with dynamite—Mecca and other shrines of Islam can be destroyed and the Mussulman population annihilated by means of machine-guns and poison gas. All this is possible, but no civilized nation, no parliament of the world, would accept the responsibility for such measures. Moreover, such a solution might produce a temporary stay, which would only be followed sooner or later by a new Holy War, by a vendetta between peoples and nations.

The system of agreements and alliances can never yield satisfactory results, for we are hated and despised by the Mussulmans, who will abide by their agreements only so long as they feel the power of Europe and will cast them away the moment they feel convinced that they might obtain better terms in an armed insurrection. They will do this not because the psychology of the East is basically unmoral and perverse, but simply because they are bound by the higher pledge to obey the commands of the Koran. Even if the intellectual classes and the governments of particular Mussulman states should forswear such a treacherous and perverse policy, there would appear somewhere a new Mahdi who would divert into the maelstrom of a Holy War the streams of men enslaved in the fetters of Islam from the Pacific to the shores of the Atlantic.

There is, however, one very definite solution of this complicated problem—to "modernize" Islam and Europeanize its ideas. Did not the Prophet and the Asiatic Arabs enforce their ideas, their Arab ideas, upon all the conquered peoples, no matter whether they dwelt in Medina and Mecca or in Allahabad, Stamboul, Sumatra and Nubia or along the Volga? Is the European ideology less sublime and less convincing, that its should be unable to achieve the same results?

Meanwhile, however, all the efforts made in this direction up to the present have failed. The attempt by Averroës



in the twelfth century and later those of Kheyr ed-Din, Gamal ed-Din and others were opposed and finally frustrated by the exponents and defenders of the Koran.

However, the young Algerians, Tunisians and Egyptians who have passed through French, English and German colleges have already made a breach in the ancient walls of Islam, for they have wrought considerable changes in the family life of the Mussulmans, among others the removal of the veils of their women and their introduction into the community life as the equals of men. The orthodox Moslem families and the folk of the *duars* and native villages look with awe upon these reforms, but the germ once injected will multiply and spread the "disease."

European civilization, by having brought Moslems into contact with its sources through education, has for the time being created new cadres among its own foes. All these young Mussulmans demand independence and autonomy and think in their youthful pride and in the exaggerated conceit of semi-intellectuals that they alone will be able to govern the country and to lead its population toward true progress and civilization.

At present they are being supported by the masses, even by the elders of Islam, by the Marabouts and by powerful religious brotherhoods; for they are regarded as weapons in the struggle with the infidel, the struggle to win supremacy for the religion of the Prophet and for a Mussulman Empire which will absorb or annihilate all those who do not at present recognize the Koran.

In this case, again for the sake of the greater ideals, a sacrifice is made of the lesser ones; but, once the period in which such men are useful has passed, they will all perish at the hands of a crowd of fanatics, true to and inspired by the more drastic tenets of the Koran.

Shall the Mussulmans then be left to their own

fate? This would be a crime at Europe's door. It would be like leaving to its own fate a district affected by leprosy or cholera and without means to combat the epidemic.

Mussulman "civilization" does not exist. We know the political and religious ideas which form the basis of Islam, but there is no Islamic civilization; and it is this fact that prevents all progress in the followers of the Sacred Book. Left to themselves, the Mussulman peoples will become a stagnant, moribund quag; their countries will be turned into enormous battlefields of civil wars, political, dynastic and religious conflicts and places of epidemic, famine and all elemental disasters. The abyss of degeneration and prostration will become deeper and deeper.

European civilization alone is capable of giving the Asiatic peoples a permanent place among the active members of the great family of nations. A civilization which saves, helps, teaches, enriches but takes nothing, steals nothing, despises no one and respects religious feelings, moral ideals and love of freedom—that is the European civilization which should be shown to the Mussulmans, who so uncomplacingly hate and despise us.

In that march of civilization toward the innermost strongholds of Islam an important rôle could be played by the Mussulman woman, to-day an oppressed and unhappy creature, held in contempt by her men-folk. Is not she the defender of Islam in the family, be it in a well-built home or in a tent? She plants the word and the law of the Prophet in the hearts of young generations; she retains the old pagan cults and the Arab magic of the Middle Ages, which was brought to Africa by the Andalusian Moors; she seeks salvation and spiritual comfort in various sects, heresies, gloomy superstitions and beliefs and struggles with the contempt and severity of her men-folk: but as yet the Mussulman woman has never spoken.

She has suffered everything and acquiesced in everything with the words "*Insh Allah*" on her lips ; she has wept, beaten her head in despair against the wall, but never yet has she raised her voice. Given equal rights, or perhaps even only education, she will shatter from inside the great, mouldy castle of Islam ; for the revolts of slaves have always shattered and destroyed the most magnificent empires in every corner of the world.

The Moslem woman will be able to do this, for she can now, during the bitter struggle with Europeans for independence, kindle hope and courage in the hearts of the warriors who have always despised women, she can die with a rifle or a knife in her hand and she can transmit the love of faith and tradition in the blood of her children.

O Selhim, Selhim, O *sahira* and *kahina*, daughter of the desert ! The tale of your strange, tragic fate, which was unfolded in white Algiers, uncovered to me not only the beautiful visage of a Mussulman woman, but also her soul, full of the treasure of unguessed noble impulses.

Such were my thoughts as I watched the disappearing yellow shores of Africa and the peaks of Kabylia until they had all slipped beyond the horizon.

Shall I ever see thee again, Africa, thou glorious mausoleum of the pious Idrisides, the tragic Saadites, the proud Almohades ; of ever-greedy Carthage, of powerful Rome, of decaying Byzantium ; of the bloodthirsty Vandals and of hordes of other invaders ?

Shall I ever step again upon thy sun-baked soil, from whose every corner there whispered to me tribes and nations that have vanished in thy dust ? Wilt thou ever forget thy hatred for the infidel ? Will a new war kindle red flames within the walls of thy cities, in thy villages and in thy *duars* ?

And you, *mumen*, worshipper of Allah ! Will you never stretch out your hand to your brother before the Creator, who worships Allah and the Son of Allah in Aïssa ?

As I gazed and wondered whence and how might come the answers to these questions and doubts, there came only the driving hiss of a wave that shattered itself against our bows and the roar of the wind through the rigging, while the gulls, those soft heralds of coming storm, rode the wind or dipped to catch the spray of a broken crest of foam.

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